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**Business English as a Lingua Franca in Saudi Multinational Corporations
A Qualitative Investigation of Communicative Strategies and Orientations to Use in International Workplaces**

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King's College London

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**Business English as a Lingua Franca in Saudi
Multinational Corporations:**

**A Qualitative Investigation of Communicative
Strategies and Orientations to Use in International
Workplaces**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a PhD
degree at King's College London

School of Social Sciences and Public Policy

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Abstract

It is beyond dispute now that English is the preferred language of international business and intercultural communication, and that having basic English skills is a requirement for any individual trying to engage in today's globalized business world. This explains the emergence of a specific field of ELF (English as a lingua franca) research that investigates ELF in business settings, i.e. BELF, which refers to business English as a lingua franca. BELF research emphasizes mutual understanding as the parameter for successful communication, without having to mimic a native speaker (NS) model of English because in business contexts, business matters most, and language skills are considered secondary.

Research into ELF and BELF has been carried out extensively in limited geographical locations: predominantly in Europe and East Asia. Therefore, investigating ELF in other parts of the world is essential if we want to provide a better understanding of how it operates. My principal research objective is to help fill this research gap by providing insights into a vibrant context of business communication in the Middle East – an area which has not been investigated so far. Its main purpose is to provide an in-depth investigation of BELF in Saudi multinational corporations (MNCs). The investigation focuses on BELF speakers' shared communicative strategies, in addition to the participants' orientations toward using BELF in their daily business life.

In this research, I employ qualitative, ethnographically-oriented research techniques in order to provide an in-depth and detailed analysis of BELF use, including the perceptions of the people using it. Because I am investigating an arena of international communication, my participants come from different linguacultural backgrounds. As the participants are engaged in a social practice, this study draws on the community of practice model. Therefore, a qualitative, ethnographically-oriented approach is adopted, with data collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and recordings of naturally-occurring conversations.

This thesis contributes to the understanding of the pragmatic aspects of BELF communication by examining how participants draw on their multilingual shared repertoire to co-construct meaning. The analysis of the recorded conversations provides strong evidence of the important roles of different communicative strategies for the negotiation of meaning. Code-switching, in particular, proved to be the most characteristic strategy in the MNC where this study takes place. Other communicative strategies such as paraphrasing, hedging, backchannels and utterance completions also play important roles in both co-constructing meaning and in smoothing conversations. The analysis of the interview data reveal the participants perception of the use of BELF in their workplace, the challenges they face when communicating in BELF, and their perceptions of their NS colleagues and managers. Findings from this thesis can be useful in advancing awareness of the BELF phenomenon in business communication in Saudi Arabia specifically and in the world generally, and in developing new training materials for business English courses and business intercultural communication training programmes based on the sociolinguistic realities of the business domain.



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Chapter 1 Introduction and Outline

1.1 Introduction

English as a language has gained a global position that no other language has ever had before in terms of its number of speakers and its variation in settings and domains of use. This position has given rise to a plethora of matters, one of which is its role as a lingua franca in intercultural communication. It has also presented a new aspect of linguistic research into English, i.e. English as a lingua franca (ELF), which has emerged as distinct research paradigm.

Jenkins (2009a: 200), a prominent ELF researcher, defines ELF as ‘the common language of choice, among speakers who come from different linguacultural backgrounds’. ELF proponents assert that English used in ELF contexts should be defined functionally by its use in intercultural communication rather than formally by its reference to native-speaker norms (cf. Hülmbauer, 2009; Santner-Wolfartsberger 2011). Under this functional definition, effectiveness and mutual intelligibility are of paramount importance in ELF interactions, in which interlocutors are immersed in the purpose of their talk. The field of business, with its emphasis on effectiveness and efficiency, is the most vibrant environment where English plays the role of a lingua franca in the sense described above. In fact, as Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey (2011) explain, business is one of the fields in which ELF is extensively used; and therefore, along with higher education, it is one of the fields that has been most researched by ELF researchers.

As the preferred language of international business and intercultural communication, English is now a requirement for any individual trying to engage in today's globalized business world. This demand for English skills explains the emergence of a specific field of ELF research that investigates ELF in business settings, i.e. BELF, which refers to business English as a lingua franca (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanraanta, 2005). Ehrenreich (2009) observes that for business professionals, business matters most; language skills are considered to have a subordinate function. Similarly, Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) found that BELF is an integral part of business knowledge and expertise, and approximating the native English speaker (NES)

model of English is not a concern in the business world. This type of language use is one aspect of my interest in this research area.

Research into ELF has been carried out extensively in a relatively limited number of geographical locations: predominantly in Europe and East Asia. Therefore, investigating ELF in general, and BELF in particular, in other parts of the world is essential if we want a better understanding of how it operates. My principal research objective, therefore, is to help fill this research gap by providing an in-depth investigation of BELF in the rich business communication context of the Middle East, specifically in Saudi multinational corporations (MNCs). This is an area which has not yet been investigated. The research focuses on BELF users' shared discourse practices and communicative strategies, in addition to the participants' orientations toward using BELF in their daily business life.

MNCs around the world choose English as their corporate language in order to coordinate the work of their multilingual teams and to communicate with their multilingual clients. In spite of this long-established practice, the role of language has attracted surprisingly little attention in the field of business intercultural communication. The importance of my research, then, stems from the fact that it attempts to provide an ELF-based account of how English is employed to achieve business goals, a perspective that so far has rarely been taken with regard to language in business. The findings of this research may be highly important, especially in advancing awareness of the BELF phenomenon in the business communication in Saudi Arabia specifically and in the world generally, and in developing new training materials for business English courses and business intercultural communication training programmes based on the sociolinguistic realities of the business domain.

As for my research methodology, I attempt to answer ELF scholars' persistent call for in-depth and 'clearly situated qualitative studies with a strong ethnographic element' (Seidlhofer *et al.*, 2006: 21) by studying both the use of BELF and the attitudes of BELF users. As the participants in the field of business are engaged in a social practice, this study draws on the community of

practice (CoP) model (Lave and Wenger 1991), which relies specifically on ethnographic techniques. Hence, an ethnographically oriented approach is adopted, with data collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and recordings of naturally occurring conversations. By adopting such an approach, I aim to capture the multidimensional realities of my research area as comprehensively as possible in order to answer the following research questions.

1.2 Research questions

Based on my research focus on BELF use in Saudi MNCs, and my review of the available literature on ELF, BELF and the relationship between language and culture, I arrived at the following research questions:

1. What functional roles and status do Arabic, English and other languages have in Deema Arabia as a Saudi MNC?
2. What are the salient features of BELF communication in Deema Arabia as a Saudi MNC?
3. How is intercultural communication in BELF perceived in Deema Arabia as a Saudi MNC?

It can be seen that my research questions are broad and general in nature. As Chapter 5 indicates, this design complies with the principles of ethnographic research. The flexibility allows for further modification of the research focus during the course of data collection and analysis to better describe the sociolinguistic reality of the actual fieldwork.

1.3 Outline

Chapter 1 gives a brief introduction, presents the research questions and outlines the following chapters.

Chapter 2 starts by discussing the reasons behind the unprecedented spread of English around the world and the status of English as the world's most widely used language nowadays. The chapter then outlines some of the most important models that have been put forward to explain this spread of English, with emphasis on Kachru's (1985) model. To demonstrate the models, the chapter specifically looks at English use in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states from the particular perspective of the countries' historical background and current ethno-linguistic scene. Following this demonstration, the chapter discusses two of the most widely used paradigms of English in its international role, the paradigm of World Englishes (WE) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). It then presents how ELF has been defined so far by various scholars in the field. The focus of this chapter finally moves to investigating the role of ELF in intercultural communication with emphasis on the role of language in business intercultural communication research, and on existing intercultural communication research in the context of Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 3 first presents the CoP model, with reference to how sociolinguistic research as well as how ELF research have employed it, in addition to how this model can be utilized to study BELF. Then, it presents the definition of BELF and discusses its role in the workplace. The chapter next discusses the previous research on BELF. It starts with the research done on BELF users' perceptions of communicating in BELF in their workplaces, moves on to BELF users views on identity-related issues and finally reviews BELF research findings regarding NES as BELF users.

Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive account of ELF/BELF pragmatics as reported in previous research. It presents the debates regarding ELF pragmatics while discussing the two pragmatic properties of ELF interactions, including speech accommodation and ELF cultural hybridity. It then moves on to give overviews of different accounts of ELF communicative strategies from sociolinguistic and pragmatic viewpoints and from BELF/ELF-specific perspectives. The chapter next discusses previous ELF research on these strategies under two subheadings: same-speaker strategies and other-speaker strategies. Following this discussion is an outline of the use of code-switching as the most well-documented communicative strategy in ELF interactions, starting from the sociolinguistic models that account for the use of code-switching in multilingual communities and ending with findings from ELF research on code-switching. Finally, in light of the discussion of

ELF interactional pragmatics, Chapter 4 ends with a discussion of ELF researchers' reconceptualization of the concept of competence with discussion of Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's (2011) model of Global Communicative Competence (GCC) in BELF.

Chapter 5 starts by re-stating the research questions. It then explains the guiding assumptions followed during data collection and analysis. It sketches out the sociolinguistic reality of my research site, which is an MNC in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. It then discusses ethnography as a research paradigm with emphasis on the methodological significance of adopting an ethnographic perspective in my research. This is followed by a detailed account of the ethnographic methods which were employed to collect my research data. The chapter ends with a discussion of the data analysis procedures used to generate the research findings.

Chapter 6 addresses the first research question in the first two sections and then partially addresses the second research question throughout the rest of the chapter. It starts by presenting an account of the status and functions of Arabic, English and other languages in the field site based on my observations and the interview data. It then moves on to a discussion of the use of code-switching as a communicative strategy in the field site. This discussion starts with the participants' views on the use of code-switching in their BELF talk. The effect of the presence of native English speakers is then examined. Finally, the different communicative functions that code-switching plays in my BELF users' talk are displayed with extracts from the recorded data to support the analysis.

Chapter 7 addresses the second research question and discusses the different communicative strategies that BELF users in my research employ in order to smooth interactions or to reach mutual understanding. These strategies are discussed under two main labels: same-speaker strategies (e.g. paraphrase and hedging) and other-speaker strategies (e.g. utterance completions and backchannels). The analysis of these strategies is supported by extracts from the recorded meeting data.

Chapter 8 addresses the third research question by looking at the participants' perceptions of the use of BELF in their workplace. The chapter is organized based on the themes that emerged from the data analysis of the ethnographic interviews. It starts by presenting my participants' pragmatic views of the use of English in their workplace and then discusses their attitudes toward it. The chapter then examines the challenges BELF users reported facing in their daily use of English in the workplace. These challenges include communicating with speakers with lower proficiencies, communicating with senior staff members and addressing fairness issues (e.g. promotions). The chapter finally looks at companies' NESs' use of English from their non-native English speaker (NNES) colleagues' perspectives and from an NES perspective, and then it presents how some of my participants define what constitutes a native speaker.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis. It starts with a discussion of the research questions based on the findings of chapters 6, 7 and 8. It shows some of the methodological contributions this thesis presents. Finally the chapter reviews some of the theoretical and practical implications of this thesis and gives recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 Research into the Status of English in the World

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the particular role of English in the world, thus setting the scene for the rest of the thesis, which investigates the role of English as a business lingua franca in Deema Arabia, a context representative of Saudi Arabian MNCs (see Chapter 5 for a detailed description of Deema Arabia). I begin this chapter with a description of the current status of English worldwide, with reference to some of the factors that could have contributed to its emergence as the world's primary lingua franca. I then present the most important models that account for the spread of English worldwide. Although no model provides an ideal, comprehensive representation of all the different sociolinguistic realities of English speakers around the world, Kachru's (1985) concentric circles model has served as a useful tool to explain the use of English worldwide. As a specific context for this study, the history of English in the countries which comprise the GCC is then considered in detail, and a description of the current ethno-linguistic make-up of the area is provided. The accelerated spread of English has introduced many labels to the field and has led to the emergence of some research paradigms that attempt to capture the essence of English with respect to its international role. The most influential ones are World Englishes (WE) and English as lingua franca (ELF). These two paradigms are discussed in this chapter with reference to why the term ELF is preferred in the context of my study. Finally, the role of ELF in intercultural communication is discussed in detail with reference to the role of language in business intercultural communication research, and the reported Arabic intercultural communication patterns.

2.2 The current world status of English

Crystal (2003: 3) comments that 'a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country'. In this sense, English has achieved an unprecedented global position no other language has ever held before (Seidlhofer, 2004). Although many languages have been recognized in the past and present as lingua francas, i.e. contact languages, including Greek, Latin, French and Arabic (Meierkord, 2006), only English has

become a language used for this purpose on a worldwide scale and spoken by members of so many varied social and linguistic backgrounds. English permeates societies throughout the globe, and it is the official language of many technological, educational and business settings (Seidlhofer, 2011: 2). Dewey (2007) identifies three fundamental ways in which English stands out as an international language: its geographical diffusion, the vast cultural diversity of its speakers and the varied purposes and fields in which it is used. There is no official census as to the exact number of English speakers in the world. However, McArthur (2002) states that English is used in at least 90 countries, 70 of which use English as an official or semi-official language, with 1.4 billion people worldwide having used English at some point. More recently, Crystal (2008) conservatively estimates that there are 2 billion speakers of English as a second language or as a lingua franca worldwide. Seidlhofer (2011: 2) cites Beneke (1991), who some 21 years ago estimated that about 80 per cent of English verbal exchanges involved no native speakers of English (NESs). Seidlhofer (ibid.) estimates that this percentage is likely to be considerably higher now. Graddol (1997) predicts that in the future, English will be the predominate language used for communication among non-native English speakers (NNESs) in multinational settings.

According to McArthur (2002: 55), a lingua franca 'arises out of historical circumstances'. Similarly, Graddol (1997) asserts that the current role of English is as a result of historical developments, which could not conceivably repeat themselves in the twenty-first century. Crystal (2003) refers to two main factors that have contributed to the spread of English across the world. The first is the growth of British colonial dominance during the nineteenth century, and the second is the industrial and technological revolution in conjunction with the status of the United States as the economic, military and scientific leader during the twentieth century. He believes that the latter factor continues to explain the global position of the English language today (ibid.). This explanation, however, appears to be flawed considering that nowadays NESs constitute a minority and that NNESs' agency in the spread and development of English has now been properly recognized (cf. Brutt-Griffler, 2002). In addition, the phenomenon of globalization, which can be defined as 'the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction' (Held and McGrew, 2000: 4), has generated the need for intercultural communication and necessitated the existence of a language for use in this context. All the aforementioned factors have contributed to the development of

English as a global language. As Crystal (2003: 120) asserts, English utilized all the opportunities available to it 'in the right place at the right time' to become the world's number one international language. The need to conceptualize this global presence of English in a model that accounts for its existence in different parts of the world was felt by many prominent researchers. The next section demonstrates several of the more influential models which have been proposed.

2.3 Models that account for the spread of English worldwide

There have been a number of attempts to devise a model of the spread of English worldwide. One of the oldest is Strevens' world map (1980), which shows the spread of the two main NS varieties of English: American English and British English. This model shows where speakers are located around the world, but NNS varieties are not really given appropriate recognition. Another model, the 'Circle of World English', is proposed by McArthur (1987). This model places 'World Standard English' at the centre, but as Jenkins (2009a: 20) notes, the concept of World Standard English is problematic as no such variety is identifiable at this time, or likely ever will be. Kachru (1985) proposes the three concentric circles model, which has gained popularity among scholars in the field. Kachru claims that his model accounts for the spread of English, the patterns of acquisition and the functional domains in which it is typically used within different cultures and countries. The Inner Circle is made up of the NESs from the countries traditionally labelled as English-speaking, including the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Canada, Ireland and New Zealand. English, in this circle, is commonly referred to as English as a native language (ENL). The Outer Circle primarily represents the countries that were colonized by Britain, in which English is the second official language, such as Singapore, Malaysia and Kenya. English, in this context, is commonly referred to as a second language (ESL). Finally, the Expanding Circle refers to the rest of the world, where English use is traditionally defined as a foreign language (EFL)¹ such as France, Brazil and Saudi Arabia. Kirkpatrick (2006: 28) believes that the innovation in Kachru's (1985) model stems from the fact that it has turned English into many Englishes. As with the previous models presented by Strevens (1980) and McArthur (1987), Kachru's (1985) model has its drawbacks.

¹ See Dewey (2012) for a critique of these labelling conventions.

Graddol (1997) disapproves of the term 'Inner Circle', which he argues represents a major weakness of this model. He argues that the term connotes the centrality and superiority of traditional NES countries, in spite of the fact that the influence of the Inner Circle on English use worldwide is clearly declining. In a similar sense, Modiano (1999) criticizes the centrality of the major native varieties in the model because this depiction implies that all the speakers in this circle are proficient speakers, which is not the case in his view. He claims that some of the NESs are not particularly comprehensible internationally (*ibid.*). Modiano (*ibid.*) also argues that Kachru's (1985) Inner Circle emphasizes the assumption that English is the property of its NESs, who speak the prestige variety and determine 'correct usage'. Additionally, as Kachru (1985) himself notes, the categories presented in the model are not mutually exclusive, and the division between the circles is not always clear. This referential fuzziness of boundaries between ESL and EFL reduces the model's effectiveness considerably. Graddol (1997) presents a similar argument and lists almost 20 countries which are currently in the stage of transition from an EFL context to an ESL one, such as Denmark, Ethiopia, Belgium, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates. Besides, Jenkins (2009a) states that some speakers in the Outer Circle use English as a first, and in some cases only, language, which indicates that the boundary between the Inner Circle and Outer Circle is even vaguer.

The complexity of this division also arises from the fact the term 'native speaker' is ambiguous in that Outer Circle speakers are considered NESs of their own varieties of English (Higgins, 2003). In the same vein, Seidlhofer (2011: 4) states that the distinction between localized EIL (English as an International Language) (local Englishes recognized as entities of World Englishes) and globalized EIL (a common global means of international communication) is not captured in Kachru's (1985) model. Moreover, Kachru's (*ibid.*) model places some bilingual countries such as Canada and Ireland in the Inner Circle, as native speaking countries. However, Canada is an officially bilingual country where 25 per cent of the population uses French as a first language, and Ireland has Irish Gaelic as an official language alongside English. Additionally, the United States has a population of almost 40 million people whose mother tongue is Spanish (Svartick and Leech, 2006). Kachru's (1985) model has also attracted criticism pertaining to its relevance in an increasingly globalized world where national identities are no longer pre-given or tied to nationalist policies (e.g., Pennycook, 2003). Jenkins (2009a: 21) reports Kachru's defence for his

model, which states that the criticism is 'constructed primarily on misinterpretations of the model's characteristics, interpretations and implications' (Kachru, 2005: 220). In spite of the criticism of the 'Kachruvian circles', Jenkins (2009a), describes it as undoubtedly the most useful and influential model of the spread of English. Moreover, Seidlhofer (2011), in common with many others in the field, continues to use the terminology provided in Kachru's (1985) model because she believes most readers will be familiar with it, which indicates its relative popularity as a model accounting for the spread of English.

The influence and importance of Kachru's (1985) model is undisputable; however, considering the criticism presented above, Graddol (1997) rightly states that it would not be the most useful one for describing English users in the future. Alternative models that account for the worldwide spread of English have been proposed by some scholars in an attempt to improve upon Kachru's (1985) model. Jenkins (2009a: 23) states that 'degree of proficiency or expertise is an eminently (and possibly the most) useful way to approach the English of its entirety of speakers nowadays, regardless of where they come from and what other language(s) they speak'. Likewise, Graddol (2006: 110) states that Kachru himself has recently suggested that the Inner Circle is better conceived of as the group of highly proficient speakers of English, i.e. those with 'functional nativeness' regardless of how or where they learned or use the language. On this basis, other models, such as Modiano's (1999) and Rajadurai's (2005) were developed. These models allow speakers who have mastered communication in English internationally to move into the Inner Circle; the number of people in this category is apt to increase as the number of proficient, international English speakers increases. These models differ from Kachru's (1985) concerning the centrality of the NES. In particular, they replace the NES with alternative concepts that ensure both NESs and NNEs are included, based on their ability to communicate effectively at regional and international levels. Nonetheless, like Kachru's (1985) model, these models classify English speakers into circles with fuzzy, hard-to-identify boundaries.

2.4 English in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states

Because this thesis investigates the use of BELF in Saudi Arabia, a brief historical background of the existence of English in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and a

description of the ethno-linguistic context is essential. In the next sections, I present a comprehensive picture of these based on the limited research done in this area.

2.4.1 Historical background

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established on May 25, 1981. It comprises six states: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain as the map in Figure 1 below shows. The spread of English in the GCC countries happened alongside its spread across the rest of the world. Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, Britain expanded its colonial power throughout many regions in the East, including Arabic-speaking countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Palestine. (This was in addition to its colonial existence in the Indian subcontinent in Southeast Asia.) Although Britain had little colonial interest in the Gulf area per se, Britain was interested in the Gulf's strategic location along trade routes to India (Charise, 2007; Onley, 2007). The Gulf states were not occupied properly as colonies; however, by 1820, Britain had signed an agreement with Oman to protect the waterways taken by British traders in India. Subsequently, all Gulf states had signed similar treaties. Saudi Arabia was the last to sign such an agreement and only did so after an armed struggle with the British military forces in 1915. In contemplation of making the Gulf states protectorates, Britain offered military support and infrastructure advancement in the region and left local monarchies with almost supreme rule over their countries. Saudi Arabia was the first to declare its independence from the British protectorship in 1932 (Charise, 2007).



Figure 1 Map of the GCC states

Since the seventh century, Islam and Arabic (itself an important lingua franca) historically have been strong unifiers in the Gulf region. Nevertheless, its geographic position – a crossway between West and North Africa, Europe, India, and Asia – has guaranteed that the region is in constant contact with diverse languages and cultures. Turkish, as the official language of the Ottoman Empire, was taught at Ottoman owned and operated schools (Abuhamdia, 1988). Additionally, in the holy sites of Saudi Arabia, Makka and Madina, millions of Muslims, both Arabs and non-Arabs, take part in pilgrimages every year. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, different local varieties of Arabic constituted the basic languages of communication (ibid., see also Charise, 2007), although the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the Muslim pilgrims and the travelling traders in the area, as well as its strategic location, imply that different languages were used for trade purposes. With the British presence in the second half of the nineteenth and the

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first half of the twentieth centuries, English was gradually employed as a lingua franca (Fussell, 2011).

After the termination of British protectorships, the use of the English language was maintained through its addition into the Gulf states' public schools as a subject (Fussell, 2011). It is important to note that as a result of the less intrusive colonial presence in the area (protectors as opposed to colonizers), the attitudes of the locals towards English were mostly positive (Charise, 2007). Additionally, because of the Gulf states' somewhat large political independence during the time of the British presence, English was perceived as a facilitator of the process of nation building, rather than as an impediment to it (Charise, 2007, see also Fussell, 2011). This bears some resemblance to the sociolinguistic reality of many other countries that were former British colonies and that belong to the so-called outer circle in the Kachru (1985) model, e.g., Hong Kong and Singapore, and in which English now has a widespread official status. However, the robust historical, cultural, and religious connections of Arabic continue to guarantee its pre-eminence as a unifying language in this area. Nonetheless, English serves numerous functions in the Gulf area, including in the business context under consideration in this thesis.

2.4.2 The ethno-linguistic scene in the Gulf Cooperation Council states

Arabic is the only official language of the GCC states. Nevertheless, a number of different languages are also widely spoken, namely Urdu, Farsi Tagalog, and Pashto (Gordon, 2005), and in Saudi Arabia specifically, Indonesian languages are also spoken. In spite of its geographical location on the main trade way contributing to its linguacultural diversity, some economic factors have greatly impacted the existing ethnic and linguistic profile of the GCC. Enormous income from oil exports has spurred an unparalleled growth of construction and infrastructure projects, which has necessitated recruiting labourers from surrounding countries. Nowadays, in most parts of the GCC, expatriates outnumber locals. Among the best examples of this expatriate influx is the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which Graddol (1997) believes falls into the grey area of Kachru's (1985) model, as English has become a 'second' instead of a 'foreign' language. In the UAE, expatriates from South and Southeast Asia constitute nearly eighty per cent of the total population.

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait also have a substantial number of expatriates, contributing to the multilingual/multicultural setting of the GCC area. Although there are currently somewhat fewer foreign workers in Saudi Arabia, recent research shows that expatriates are more likely to secure a new job in Saudi Arabia than in any other country in the GCC (The Economist, 2009). According to the latest employment data released by GulfTalent, a leading employment institution in the area, the number of expatriate employees in Saudi Arabia rose by an estimated 2.4 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2009. The current percentage of non-Saudis with working visas is 44.3 per cent, of which 71 per cent are non-Arabic speakers (Saudi Census, 2010).

In order to organize the massive number of multinational expatriate development projects in the area, hybrid varieties of Urdu or Hindi and English are widely employed as lingua francas (Peel, 2004). However, the UAE's Ministry of Labour has recently declared plans to devise a policy, according to which a basic knowledge of the English language is a prerequisite for anyone applying for a working visa in the country (Issa, 2006). Applying this policy indicates that English is vital as a lingua franca among eighty per cent of the population. Such a prerequisite is not officially implemented in Saudi Arabia, but most institutions, especially in the private sector, require certain levels of English competence. Al-Khatib (2006) notes the intensified use of English as the main lingua franca among the non-local labourers in the GCC area. With the introduction of Saudization (a term used to refer to government policies that encourage hiring Saudi nationals in private sector organizations to counter unemployment amongst Saudi nationals) in the late 1990s, it became very important for Saudi nationals to learn English so that they could take over service industry positions as well as positions within the core industries (Mahboob and Elyas, 2014). This economic need driven by a social imperative increased the demand for improved English teaching.

English is also extensively used by the vast number of Southeast Asian domestic labourers in the GCC area, who usually originate from countries with established English varieties (Leonard, 2005). In fact, a report presented by GulfTalent (2010) asserts that India will continue to serve as

a source for skilled labour, or any work that requires English language skills. Historical connections between the Gulf and South Asia were established during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by Britain, which facilitated commonalities between the two parts of the world such as currency, political officers, and other forms of lexical exchange between Urdu and Arabic (Leonard, 2005). Most families in the Gulf rely on imported domestic labour from India, the Philippines, and Indonesia (Gordon, 2005), countries that fall into Kachru's (1985) Outer Circle, where English became nativised because it is spoken as an official second language. Upper- and middle-class children are usually taken care of by Filipino or south-eastern nannies, which presents more chances for English to be used alongside Arabic within the household. Peel (2004) asserts that a monolithic all-Arabic speaking household is fairly rare to find in the UAE. This is likely to be the situation throughout the region for similarly structured domestic circumstances. Poole (2006) presents a detailed account of English in Oman, which is largely influenced by Indian English while adopting a normative view on both Omani and Indian Englishes.

The current use of English in the GCC states cannot be confined to a number of contexts. However, it can be said that the wider use of English is evident in two important aspects of life in the GCC states, i.e. higher education and international business. These two fields are internationally recognized as fields where the use of English as a lingua franca prevails, and they are, to date, the most researched domains of ELF use (see Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey, 2011: 297). English is taught as a subject in public schools starting in grade four in Saudi Arabia, and in all grades and levels in private schools. It is also widely used in the media including newspapers, television, radio and the Internet. In Saudi Arabia, there are at least seven English-speaking TV channels that broadcast shows produced in the West with Arabic subtitles most of the time. There are also two major English newspapers, *Saudi Gazette* and *Arab News*, published by the two largest Saudi publication houses. Most Internet websites have both Arabic and English versions. Generally, there is wide diffusion of English at different professional and societal levels in Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states.

English is widely recognized as a lingua franca, a fact that creates significant opportunities for linguistic research in the GCC context (Poole, 2006). Given the influence of Arabic as an official

language and the diverse ethnic composition of the Gulf, it is worth investigating whether this unique language mixture has facilitated a version of English specific to the GCC states. Having presented a general description of the status of English worldwide and in the GCC, in the next section I discuss the different labels and research paradigms that address the worldwide spread of English.

2.5 Labels of English in its international role

The obvious expansion of English globally has led to the emergence of a number of fields of research and literature that critically assess its spread by using different labels to refer to English. These include: World Englishes (WE), English as an international language (EIL), English as a global language, and English as a lingua franca (ELF). Seidlhofer (2004: 210) comments that whenever English is used among people with different first language backgrounds, it tends to be modified by adding 'as a (n) x' to it, which indicates that there is no consensus regarding the concept that terms refer to. According to Seidlhofer (ibid.) and Bolton (2004), the term World Englishes (WE) can serve as an umbrella for all these labels. The study of WE is now a well-established field, however, and tends to be mostly concerned with Outer Circle Englishes, as is discussed in section 2.5.1 below (see also Kachru and Nelson, 2006).

The term 'International English' was first introduced by Smith (1976) to refer to English as a language that is used by different nations to communicate with each other. Because it suggests a monolithic view of English, this term was later challenged by the emergence of the WE paradigm², which celebrates diversity when accounting for English in the world, especially in the Outer Circle, as is discussed below. Other researchers (e.g. McKay 2002) use the term 'English as an international language' (EIL) to refer to the use of English in international communication among NNEs, as well as in communication between NNEs and NEs. The other term that has been widely used and has gained popularity over the last decade is 'English as a lingua franca' (ELF), which is the preferred term for this research and which is discussed in detail in section [2.6](#).

² It is worth acknowledging that Smith has been instrumental in the development of the WE paradigm and is recognized as a WE scholar (cf. Smith 1992).

2.5.1 The World Englishes paradigm

Kachru's (1985) circles and the models that account for the spread of English in the world are generally associated with the World Englishes (WE) paradigm. The WE concept refers to the emergence of localized or indigenized varieties of English, especially varieties that have emerged in countries which were colonized by Britain, i.e. Kachru's Outer Circle. Kachru (1985, 1992) claims that norms of NES, such as speech acts and registers, are irrelevant to the sociolinguistic reality in which members of the Outer Circle use English. Kachru (1985) also opines that acknowledging a variety of norms does not lead to a lack of intelligibility among different users of English. Widdowson (1994) supports Kachru's position on this by stating that many bilingual users of English acquire the language in educational contexts, which emphasizes a particular standard and ensures some unifying forms. Kachru (1985: 30) suggests challenging traditional notions of standardization and models as they appear to be related only to Inner Circle users.

Although Kachru's (1985, 1992) model is influential in accounting for Englishes in the Outer Circle, ascribing the status of 'norm providing' to Inner Circle varieties, the status of 'norm developing' to Outer Circle varieties and the status of 'norm dependent' to English in the Expanding Circle is a major drawback associated with the model. As stated in section [2.3](#), this notion is challenged by Brutt-Griffler (2002), who acknowledges and highlights the NNESS' agency in the spread and development of the language.

Some scholars (e.g. Jenkins 2006) felt that the WE paradigm is somehow restrictive, especially with the continuous expansion in the number of domains in which English is used and the number of functions it performs in the Expanding Circle. Therefore, the WE paradigm highlights limitations that are clearly more relevant to the Englishes of the Outer Circle, where these varieties are used intranationally, than to the Expanding Circle where English is mainly used as a lingua franca. This particular deficit in the model has gained considerable attention in recent years. The model does not seem to take into account the reality that English has acquired a new dominant worldwide function, i.e. as a lingua franca among all three circles and especially within the Expanding Circle. In an article that discusses the common ground and different realities of WE and ELF, Seidlhofer (2009b) states that it is not reasonable to treat contexts that are sociohistorically different as if

they were the same. Therefore, a new paradigm of research has emerged to account for English in its lingua franca role, i.e. English as a lingua franca (ELF).

2.5.2 English as a lingua franca (ELF)

English as a lingua franca (ELF) refers to English interactions in international and intercultural settings where English is the language of choice by interactants who do not usually share another language (cf. Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). In this sense, the term ELF can be used interchangeably with English as an international language (EIL). However, some scholars, such as McKay (2002), use EIL to refer strictly to NNS-NNS communication. ELF is defined in greater detail in a later section (section [2.6](#)); the purpose of the discussion here is only to clarify the terminology and explain why ELF as a term is preferred in this project. ELF is currently undergoing the process of differentiation and gaining recognition; WE had to undergo this same process and recognition gain three decades ago (Jenkins, 2009b: 243). As a starting point, ELF takes a position similar to that of WE, in that if an item is different from the way it is produced by ENL speakers, this does not necessarily indicate that is an error.

What ELF and WE have in common is that they have both raise some unorthodox and difficult questions and present major challenges to the conservative, mainstream second language acquisition (SLA) research (Seidlhofer, 2009). WE and ELF are both centrifugal and diversifying as they are not constrained by NES norms (Murata and Jenkins, 2009: 3). Pakir (2009) identifies four main similarities between WE and ELF. These are: 'emphasizing the pluricentricity of English, seeking variety recognition, accepting that language changes and adapts itself to new environments, and observing the discourse strategies of English-knowing bilinguals' (p. 233).

The inclusion of speakers from all of Kachru's (1985) circles is a quality both paradigms claim to have, with extra emphasis on the Outer Circle in the case of WE (cf. Pakir 2009) and on the Expanding Circle in the case of ELF (cf. Seidlhofer 2009). However, the definition of WE as a research paradigm, and the empirical focus of WE research on geographically defined communities do not lend support to this claim. In fact, one of the considerable differences

between ELF and WE is that the latter has major empirical focus on defining speech communities by identifying characteristics of different English varieties on a national basis. This indicates that WE scholars are partially aiming to 'fix' the language, which is, as stated above, not at all an ELF research goal (Cogo and Dewey, 2012: 13). Canagarajah (2007), for instance, argues that language forms in ELF are ineluctably emergent, and appear to be negotiated by each set of speakers for their purposes in situ. This 'in situ', moreover, is itself potentially changeable on a turn-by-turn basis.

In spite of the frequent attempts of ELF researchers to resolve the recurrent ambiguities and misconceptions regarding ELF (cf. Dewey and Jenkins, 2010), the debate between WE and ELF is persistent. Just as WE had to struggle for recognition from ENL scholars in its early stages, ELF is now in confrontation with both ENL and WE supporters. Some WE scholars argue that ELF is monolithic and monocentric, a 'monomodel' in which 'intercultural communication and cultural identity are to be made a necessary casualty' (Rubdy and Saraceni, 2006: 11; see also O'Regan, 2014). This claim may have been understood a decade ago when ELF research was in its infancy. However, this argument can no longer be justified if we consider the writings of ELF leading researchers who always assert the pluricentric nature of ELF (cf. Seidlhofer, 2006 in the same volume in which Rubdy and Saraceni, 2006 present their claim). This argument is sometimes based on the simple misassumption that English in ELF is singular as opposed to the plural Englishes in WE (e.g. Kachru and Nelson, 2006; O'Regan, 2014). Pennycook (2009) states that the important question is not related to pluralization, but to the language ideologies that underlie the visions of plurality.

Considering the WE claims that ELF research adopts a monolithic perspective as discussed above, it is interesting to point out that ELF is also sometimes criticized for having a lack of standards. This criticism comes from those who prefer a monolithic approach to English, and it is based on the fact that ELF is actually pluricentric. According to this criticism, ELF, by default, exhibits errors wherever it does not conform to the norms of certain ENL varieties, namely, British or American English. However, the notions of EFL and ELF are distinct: EFL emphasizes the role of English as a tool to facilitate communication with NESs, but ELF emphasizes the role of

English in intercultural communication where NESs are rarely present (Jenkins, 2009a: 203). It is precisely this function of ELF that makes it the most fitting concept for the purpose of this research project.

Jenkins (2007, 2009) initially places ELF within the WE paradigm, as ELF is in tune with its plurilinguistic nature. However, as stated above, English is clearly tied to processes of globalization as 'a language of threat, desire, destruction and opportunity' (Pennycook, 2007: 5). Therefore, it must not be framed in 'state-centric models of imperialism or world Englishes, or in terms of traditional, segregationist models of language'. Pennycook (*ibid.*: 5) presents the notion of Global Englishes, a term which takes the useful pluralization strategy of WE, but locates these Englishes 'within a more complex vision of globalization'. Recently, ELF researchers decided to partially distance themselves from the WE paradigm and accepted the Global Englishes paradigm as an alternative (cf. Murata and Jenkins, 2009 and Jenkins 2014). According to Pennycook (2009: 115), such a shift has a major advantage as researchers can now 'come to grips with a non-centrist understanding of English as an international language that is dependent neither on hegemonic versions of central English nor on nationally defined new Englishes'. Within the Global Englishes paradigm, ELF is accepted as a unique phenomenon, which does not compare to any varieties of English, whether native or nativised. Pennycook (*ibid.*: 115) further emphasizes that for a better understanding of ELF, researchers need to 'account for the ever-changing negotiated spaces of current language use'. This indicates that special attention should be given to the fluidity of norms (cf. Canagarajah, 2007). Murata and Jenkins (2009) decided to accept Global Englishes as an umbrella term for all the concepts that describe the spread of English including both WE and ELF. They argue that Global Englishes 'represents the diversifying nature of Englishes used worldwide', and yet simultaneously describes people's efforts to be intelligible in intercultural settings, negotiating meanings and enjoying creativity while retaining their identities (*ibid.*: 5). In line with the above arguments, ELF is no longer treated as a variety in need of codification, but rather as language in use, which is differently co-constructed in every specific context of interaction. Having established how ELF differs from, and in fact surpasses, WE, the next section is dedicated to the definition of ELF.

2.6 Defining ELF

UNESCO (1951: 689) defines a lingua franca as a 'language used habitually by people whose mother tongues are different in order to facilitate communication between them'. Similarly, Jenkins (2007: 1) defines a lingua franca 'as a contact language used among people who do not share a first language, and it is commonly understood to mean a second (or subsequent) language to its speakers'. Many languages have served the purpose of a lingua franca during certain periods in history, including, currently, Arabic, the mother tongue of Saudi Arabians. However, the first code to be labelled as such is 'a pidgin, probably based on some Italian dialects in its earliest history, and included elements from Spanish, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, and Persian' (Knapp and Meierkord, 2002: 9).

Looking specifically at English as a lingua franca, having a straightforward definition is not unproblematic. For one thing, as a pidgin, the first code labelled as a lingua franca had no NSs; however, NSs participation in ELF interactions is an area of controversy. Most ELF projects start by presenting the two main trends in this regard, citing the earliest definitions of English in its lingua franca role by Firth (1996) and House (1999) as representatives of one view, and Seidlhofer (2004) as an advocate of the other. Firth (1996: 240) defines ELF as 'a contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common national culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication'. Similarly, House (1999: 74) believes that ELF interactions are 'between members of two or more different linguacultures in English, for none of whom English is the mother tongue'. The one aspect both definitions have in common is the exclusion of native speakers as potential participants in lingua franca interactions. However, Seidlhofer (2004: 211-2) states that 'it has to be remembered that ELF interactions often also include interlocutors from the Inner and Outer Circles'. She defines ELF as 'a way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages' (Seidlhofer, 2005: 339). Similarly, Kirkpatrick (2007: 155) defines it as 'a medium of communication used by people who do not speak the same first language'. Seidlhofer (2004: 213) describes ELF as 'a linguistic phenomenon in its own right'; she only wonders however, why so little thought has been given to the 'most essential things like the nature of the language itself as an international means of communication or finding out how ELF differs from ENL' (Seidlhofer, 2002: 271).

In support of Seidlhofer's view, Jenkins (2007: 2) states that Firth (1996) was not at that time referring to ELF as it is now perceived, i.e. being an emerging English in its own right, which is currently described in its own terms rather than by comparison with NS English. Some researchers, however, still believe that ELF interactions can be labelled as such if they include speakers from only the Expanding Circle (e.g. Pakir, 2009). This view is also adopted by one of the major ELF researchers, Kaur (2009), who studies co-constructing understanding in ELF. Generally, the inclusion of NESs is to recognize that they are part of the global use of English; however, they are no longer considered 'norm-providing' nor is their model of English considered the target model. In this study, the view adopted is that of Seidlhofer (2004) and Jenkins' (2001), since NESs are strongly present in Saudi MNCs.

Jenkins (2007) displays the different terms that refer to English in its international role and explains why she prefers the term ELF. She believes that ELF emphasizes the role of English in communication between speakers with different first languages, which, according to her, is the primary reason for learning English today. She displays the positive connotations of the term stating that 'it suggests the idea of community as opposed to alienness; it emphasizes that people have something in common rather than their differences' (ibid.: 3-4). It is not 'primarily a local or contact language within national groups but between them' (Jenkins, 2007: 4). Seidlhofer (2004: 212) explains that ELF as a term should prevail not because its definitions restrict it to communication among NNEs as such, 'but because it best signals that it is these non-native users that provide the strongest momentum for the development of the language in its global uses'. In this sense, ELF is empowering to NNEs as 'they are the forefront of innovation and change in lingua franca English' (Jenkins, 2007: 4). Canagarajah (2007) states that although ELF speakers are separated by spatial distance, they recognize ELF as a shared resource. He argues that ELF speakers 'activate a mutually recognized set of attitudes, forms and conventions that ensure successful communication' in ELF when interacting with each other (ibid.: 925). ELF, as a term, represents a relatively new manifestation of English, which is very different in concept from EFL, the traditional, anachronistic label for English in the Expanding Circle (Jenkins, 2007).

Generally, lingua francas are looked upon functionally rather than structurally, as the latter is subordinate to the former. It is the usage of the lingua franca rather than its form that is uppermost in the speaker's mind (Lian Chew, 2009: 10). This also applies to ELF. According to Hülmbaur *et al.* (2008: 27), ELF is usually defined functionally by its use as a medium of intercultural communication rather than formally by reference to NS norms. However, Saraceni (2008: 94) believes that there is a problem in the definitions of ELF presented above, claiming that there is a certain degree of inconsistency in the way ELF has been defined. He argues that there is a lack of clarity as to whether ELF is about form or function, whether it refers to a language variety or a set of varieties, or simply to the role English plays worldwide (*ibid.*). However, this alleged ambiguity is resolved by some of the recent writings of ELF researchers (e.g. Cogo and Dewey, 2012) that provide comprehensive definitions of what ELF is. ELF as a paradigm has continued to adapt its definitions as more empirical evidence has emerged.

Seidlhofer (2004: 211) states that whatever the setting is, ELF interactions usually occur in 'influential networks' such as international business, politics, science and technology. However, the constellation of speakers and the situational context naturally varies from one interaction to another (Hülmbaur, 2007). Therefore, context as a defining parameter needs to be recognized as a crucial element in the evaluation and analysis of ELF. To this end, more situated studies of ELF have emerged to study its usage in particular contexts. The most vibrant contexts for ELF research are two fields in which English is extensively used worldwide: business and higher education. Two variations of ELF, as a result, have been acknowledged: business English as lingua franca (BELF) which is the main focus of this research, and English as a lingua franca in academic settings (ELFA). This important contextualization of ELF is discussed in Chapter 3.

In my view, the most comprehensive definition of ELF is provided in Cogo and Dewey (2012: 11-13). They take into consideration most of the questions raised regarding the nature of ELF and present three principal levels they believe necessary to define ELF. First, in terms of settings, ELF investigates any contact language setting in which English is used as the main medium of communication; these settings, according to Cogo and Dewey, can include speakers from all the three circles identified by Kachru (1985). Second, in terms of its function, Cogo and Dewey (2012:

12) define ELF interactions as any interaction in which English is the preferred means of intercultural communication among speakers who do not share a first language. These speakers are predominantly from the Expanding Circle, and their linguacultural composition is their defining feature rather than their geographical location. Finally, in their definition of ELF, Cogo and Dewey (ibid.) recognize it as a research field that has recently emerged in sociolinguistics. In this sense, they define it as 'the empirical study of innovative uses of English as attested in corpora of naturally occurring talk' (ibid.: 12-3). The research into ELF has had a number of recurring themes, one of which is researching ELF in terms of its linguistic levels, i.e. phonology, pragmatics and lexicogrammar (for extensive discussion of this research paradigm, see Jenkins *et al.*, 2011). Crucially, this treatment of ELF, however, is not an attempt to 'fix' the language or to identify features of ELF as a single variety; it is 'to illustrate its hybrid, mutable nature' (Cogo and Dewey, 2012: 13).

Meierkord (2007: 199) presents a different perspective in dealing with ELF. She makes a distinction between two different uses of lingua franca: intranational use (e.g. English in Saudi Arabia) and international use (e.g. English between Japanese and Saudis). Unlike participants using international ELF, participants using intranational ELF share not only linguistic codes, but also interactional conventions. These shared conventions among a national group can be, arguably, referred to as 'culture', which is an important parameter in ELF interactions. The important relationship between language and culture in intercultural communication is recognized but not investigated adequately, with the exception of Baker (2009). This study sheds some light on the management of intercultural communication through ELF and provides more insights into the relationship between language and culture, which is the focus of the next section.

2.7 ELF and intercultural communication

'Cultures'³ were traditionally defined in the same manner as languages, being related to and regarded as properties of nation states (Baker, 2009). According to Risagar (2006), this

³ I put the plural form of the word culture in quotes in order to express my rejection of the essentialized approach to the neutral notion of culture. Doing this, I follow Kubota (1999: 10), who asserts that 'a certain culture is not a monolithic, fixed,

relationship is unsatisfactory since it denies transnational processes related to internationalisation and globalisation. Therefore, as English is no longer considered an exclusive property of the traditionally labelled Inner Circle countries (see Brumfit, 2001; Widdowson, 1994), the ties between the language and the cultural practices of these countries are also loosening. As mentioned in the above section, Jenkins (2007) presents a comprehensive definition of ELF that involves communication between speakers from diverse linguacultural backgrounds. This extension is important as it highlights the language-culture connection. Just as English in ELF interactions is not guided by NS norms, the cultural practices that come into contact in ELF communication are not driven by the Inner Circle sociocultural norms. In fact, one of the presumably concerning issues in ELF is the different linguacultural backgrounds of its speakers. Kaur (2009: 8) argues that the lack of shared assumptions and knowledge among ELF speakers with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds usually leads to the misunderstandings and difficulties in communication which characterize intercultural encounters. In a study that predates ELF, Scollon and Scollon (1995: 22) assert that 'successful communication is based on sharing as much as possible the assumptions we make about what others mean'. On this basis, communication in ELF is considered particularly problematic, looking at the varying cultures that come in contact (cf. Baker 2009, 2012; Kaur, 2009 for a discussion of this misconception). Cogo and Dewey (2012: 26), who are very critical and sceptical of these claims, identify the twofold assumptions behind the view: the assumption that misunderstanding is a sign of conflict or miscommunication and the assumption that misunderstanding is a feature solely of intercultural communication. These two assumptions, according to Cogo and Dewey (2012), do not take into account the important role that misunderstanding and miscommunication play in co-constructing meaning. However, regardless of the disadvantaged nature ascribed to ELF interactions as a result of the supposed lack of shared knowledge, ELF users manage and communicate well in ELF (Kaur, 2009).

The relationship between language and culture has been investigated extensively in a general sense, but not in relation to ELF. Risagar (2006) argues that all languages, and especially

neutral or objective category but rather a dynamic organism that exists in discursive fields in which power is exercised'.

international ones like English, take on new cultural meanings during practice. She refers to these new cultural meanings as 'linguacultures', which change from user to user and from context to context. Risagar (2006: 185) asserts that 'the link between language and culture is created in every new communicative event'; therefore, a language has as many linguacultures as the number of its speakers. So, a language cannot be inseparably tied to an identifiable 'culture'. Risagar's (2006) treatment of the relationship between language and culture supports the separation of English in ELF interactions from the cultural traditions of the Inner Circle countries. ELF users are not required to adopt the cultural practices often associated with English as a native language; they only have to know the code to successfully and effectively communicate across conventional cultural boundaries (Pölzl and Seidlhofer, 2006). However, according to Baker (2009), this does not indicate that ELF is culturally neutral. Essentially, this means that English can be used as a lingua franca even when the participants do not attend to the NS cultural conventions, whatever these may be. Although some ELF research indicates otherwise (e.g. House, 1999), Baker's (2009) position in relation to the focus of my study will be better understood through an examination of the reported features of Arabs' use of English as a lingua franca, which is discussed in a later section (section [2.7.2](#)) of this research study.

Kramsch (1993) presents another perspective on language and culture. She argues that communication in a second language operates in a 'third place' between the users' first language and culture and the second language and culture. She suggests that a second language operates along a 'cultural faultline' (ibid.: 2005) in which communication is liberated from the norms of both the first and second, and this presents new perspectives on languages and cultures. For Kramsch (2009), this third place is a space of navigation and negotiation, and navigation and negotiation can be discussed in terms of reflections on an everyday basis.

In a study that is related to the learning and teaching of English, Canagarajah (2005) focuses on 'the local in the global', and views cultures in global contexts as hybrid, diffuse, and deterritorialized. In the same sense, Jenkins *et al.* (2011) assert that in the context of ELF communication, English is a globalized phenomenon, which is continuously localized during its numerous interactions. Pölzl and Seidlhofer (2006) assert that the role cultures play partly

depends on where the interaction happens. They argue that 'ELF is a global phenomenon, but it is locally realized' (ibid.: 172). In a similar sense, Pennycook (2007) asserts that the relationship between culture and language should be seen as in constant tension between what is fluid and what is fixed in terms of locations, traditions and the different forms of cultural expression.

The importance of the research discussed above is that it highlights the fluid and dynamic communicative practices and the language-culture correlations that might be expected in such contexts. To date, there is relatively limited research that investigates the cultural element in ELF. One of the earliest attempts to account for it is evident in Meierkord (2002). She investigates the concept of culture in lingua franca communication among overseas students in the UK. She concludes that cultures are created in the interactions. These cultures can be linked to L1 cultures, shared communities, third place cultures, or even hybrid cultures. This supports Baker's (2012) position that ELF is not necessarily culturally neutral. However, Meierkord (2002) observes that speakers' L1 communicative norms in her corpus often tend to be overridden by other contextual factors and do not determine ELF users' discourse. Meierkord also emphasizes the role of agency of the participants in ELF communication, who can choose how much and what cultural references to invest in their conversations.

Baker (2009) provides a detailed investigation of the cultural factor in ELF. He states that just like other forms of intercultural communication, ELF communication can be characterized by code-switching with other languages and mixing between varieties of a language. Like Meierkord (2002), Baker (2009: 574) concludes that 'linguistic cultural forms expressed through ELF are likely to be hybrid, dynamic, and continuously adapting to local needs, global influences, and the demands of communicating across cultures'.

Like Kramsch (2009), but with emphasis on ELF, Pölzl (2005) argues for a third space, specifically one which is established by participants from different linguacultural backgrounds communicating in ELF. It is 'an imagined space of negotiation and at the same time "encountered hybridity" through which new intercultural meaning, practices, and identifications are created'

(ibid.: 112). In support of Pölzl's view, Klimpfinger (2009) states that this third space is co-constructed by ELF speakers in every ELF situation parallel to each individual's first linguacultural background. This, according to her, allows participants to mix different languages, consciously or unconsciously, to emphasize their membership of different groups. Klimpfinger (2005) finds that one of the reasons ELF speakers code-switch is to signal their cultural backgrounds. In her ELF data, signalling culture through code-switching is done in two ways. First, there is emblematic switching, i.e. switching for exclamations, pause fillers, or function words to implicitly show a linguistic emblem of the culture. An example of this in Arabic intercultural communication is using the multifunctional gambit, which is frequently expressed in Arabic as *ya'ni* (Pölzl and Seidlhofer, 2006: 165). The literal translation of the gambit would either be (a) "X means Y" or (b) "what I mean by X is Y" (El Shimi, 1992: 18). This Arabic discourse marker shows a 'remarkably high frequency of occurrence' in spoken Arabic. *Ya'ni* can serve as an extension marker, an inner negotiation marker, and a deictic centre marker. It can be used to express indirect and polite disagreement (ibid.: 12). The second way to signal culture, according to Klimpfinger (2005), is through explicit code-switching, which refers to concepts that are associated with specific cultures, such as names and greetings. This can explain one of the frequently reported aspects of intercultural communication in interactions that include Arabs, or Muslims in general. This feature is religiocentrism and fatalism (Adelman and Lusting, 1981; Davies and Bentahila, 2012), which is considered one of the influences of Islam on Arab cultural patterns. Phrases such as *Inshallah* (God willing), and *Alhamdulillah* (Thanks to Allah), are frequently heard in conversations and reflect a profound belief in the will of God. Signalling cultural identity by code-switching in this way may indicate the special bond to another language and culture. Saudi Arabia, in particular, is a very religious country, and connection to the Islamic traditions is expressed through all possible means, including language. Chapter 6 of this thesis explains how the participants in this research employ code-switching to signal their cultural identity, especially in terms of this reported religiocentrism.

2.7.1 Language in business intercultural communication research

Globalization has been part of most aspects of life; however, this becomes more evident in certain fields, such as business. The increasing globalization of business produces a need for business people to learn to function effectively in another linguacultural frame. As a result, an impressive

amount of research has been conducted to explore the nature of intercultural communication in business settings in order to facilitate organizational communication (e.g. Chaney and Martin, 2011; Gibson, 2002). Moreover, an increasing number of multinational companies (MNCs) train their personnel for intercultural communication, which is a clear indication of its perceived importance. From a linguistic point of view, most of the research in the business intercultural communication literature surprisingly ignores language. There is a limited to non-existent attention to language and languages in large and popular volumes that investigate intercultural communication in business organizations (e.g. Chaney and Martin, 2011; Varner and Beamer, 2008). Marschan-Piekkari *et al.* (1997) describe the role of language as 'the forgotten factor' in management research. Similarly, Vaara *et al.* (2005: 59) observe that 'languages have received very little attention in organization and management studies'. As Maclean (2006: 1377) rightly explains, 'companies deal with language issues every day, they cope, the world continues to turn. How they do so, however, remains largely absent from the literature'.

Furthermore, the content of this scant consideration of linguistic matters tend to be of, what Piller (2007: 216) describes as, the 'weird and wonderful' kind. Typically, 'the language chapter' presents the 'Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis' and the concept of linguistic relativity, asserting that language influences the way people perceive the world, and that language makes different features of reality salient to people. Chaney and Martin (2011: 82), for instance, state that 'language represents the deepest manifestation of a culture and people's values systems'; however, they do not dedicate enough space for its role in organizational intercultural communication. According to Piller (2007), this treatment of language in business intercultural communication studies needs to be more sophisticated. In particular, it needs to take better account of natural language processes, especially multilingual communications, with consideration of the research done in fields of interactional sociolinguistics and related ethnographic approaches, in order not to mistake language-related difficulties for cultural ones. Considering Piller's (2007) statement and the fact that English is the lingua franca of the current international business environment, the need to investigate intercultural communication in ELF in business settings (BELF) is emphasized. This need further substantiates the importance of this research project, which aims to explore intercultural communication through BELF in Saudi Arabia. Having discussed the role of language in business intercultural communication research,

the next section presents the reported patterns of intercultural communication in Saudi Arabia, which is the specific context of this research project.

2.7.2 Intercultural communication in Saudi Arabia

The reasons that the intercultural aspect in ELF is given emphasis in this project are (1) its relevance to the context of study (multinational companies) as discussed above; and (2) the reported uniqueness of culture in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is used as an example to support the importance of intercultural awareness in a number of intercultural communication books (cf. Neuliep, 2008; Jandt, 2012). According to Mackey (2002: 37), 'Saudi Arabia never was nor is likely ever to be a melting pot. Its society is incapable of assimilating outsiders even on a casual basis'. Mackey's observations are just the personal impressions of a journalist, but Saudi culture in general is indeed conservative, forcing visitors to behave more sensitively to traditional norms than they might have to in other countries.

From a linguacultural perspective, research that focuses on intercultural communication in Saudi Arabia is rare. Most of the research conducted focuses on 'Arabs' as a generic label for the Arabic-speaking citizens of the twenty-two Arabic countries. Although I do not accept the use of the label 'Arab' in the sense that suggests homogeneity among all Arabs, Arabic as a unifying language is used in roughly similar ways as it performs similar functions in all the Arabic-speaking countries. Hitti (2002: 90) suggests that 'hardly any language seems capable of exercising over the minds of its users such irresistible influence as Arabic'. Therefore, even though ELF is sometimes considered culturally neutral (cf. House, 1999, 2003), the influence of Arabic on its speakers cannot be ignored. The *Handbook of Intercultural Discourse and Communication* (Paulston, Kiesling and Rangel, 2012) dedicates a chapter to Anglo-Arab intercultural communication, indicating its problematic nature. A number of characteristics that are peculiar to Arabic intercultural communication patterns have been frequently reported. These cultural features have proved to be problematic.

One of the earliest studies on Arabic intercultural communication patterns in a business setting is by Adelman and Lusting (1981), who studied intercultural communication 'problems' as perceived by Saudi and American managers. The authors believe that 'the importance of Saudi Arabia in world economic and political affairs requires insights that should not be left to chance' (ibid.: 353). They found that an understanding of essential linguistic patterns in Arabic is crucial to understanding Saudi Arabian cultural practices and behaviours. Adelman and Lusting (1981: 353) also state that as intercultural communication between Saudi Arabians and Westerners is likely to be in English, it is necessary to investigate the 'transference' of Arabic communication patterns to English. Adopting a deficiency perspective on non-ENL speech, they report three potential 'problems' that are likely to occur when Arabs use English: misunderstood intonation patterns, the tendency toward exaggeration, and the use of differing organizational logics. These perceived problems are recurrent in most of the works that attempt to depict characteristics of Arabic communication. First, the syllable stress pattern in Arabic is such that every word in a sentence is accented. When this stress pattern is transferred to English, it sounds aggressive to a NS. Second, when Saudis communicate in English, they show a tendency toward over-assertion, repetition and exaggeration. Interestingly, these tendencies, which are presented as deficiencies in Adelman and Lusting (1981), are quite similar to some of the traits displayed in ELF communication. However, in light of ELF, these practices are looked at positively, especially in terms of co-construction of meaning.

Finally, Adelman and Lusting (1981) discuss the tendency of Saudis to combine ideas through the use of conjunctions and other grammatical forms, which results in a lack of efficiency in their use of English. They argue that NESs find it difficult to find the main idea in Saudi Arabians' written and oral messages. Thus, Western linear thinking patterns create problems for Saudi Arabians using English. In a similar vein, Zahrana (1995: 242) describes communication in Arabic as 'ambiguous, indirect and emotionally rich'. Moreover, achieving precision is not as important as creating emotional resonance using language. Thus, regardless of the content of the message, differences in the delivery style can cause a message to resonate negatively or positively.

These sweeping generalizations about intercultural communication patterns in Arabic can be linked to Arabs' attitudes toward their language. It is claimed that Arabs believe that Arabic is 'something valuable in itself, not just a means of communicating ideas' (Bentahila, 1983: 135). Loosemore and Al Muslmani (1999) believe that there is justification for international business professionals to develop some command of Arabic because language plays a particularly important role in offering a sense of pride and identity to Gulf nationals. The value of Arabic as a language to its speakers is undeniable; however, expecting style and resonance to be more important than the content of the message is questionable. In a business setting where the outcome of the communication process reflects on the organization's achievement, style is much less likely to be the target of an interaction. The focus has to be placed on the content. This will be clearer in the discussion of BELF communication in the next chapter.

Studies of Arabic communication style have been heavily influenced by Hall's (1976) model of high-context versus low-context cultures. According to Hall (*ibid.*: 91), a high-context communication is 'one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message'. Conversely, in low-context communication, most of the information is in the explicit code, i.e. in the words. Talking about Arabic communication styles, Hall also mentions that what is not said is sometimes more important than what is said. Zaharna's (1995) study, as an example, focuses on how American public relations specialists can incorporate the dynamics of intercultural communication into their work with Arab customers in the U.S. The study investigates how two cultures – the Arab and the American culture – have two distinct perspectives for viewing the role of language, for structuring persuasive messages, and for communicating effectively with their audiences. Zaharna concludes that for the Arab culture, 'emphasis is on form over function, affect over accuracy, and image over meaning' (*ibid.*: 242). Zaharna (*ibid.*), Cohen (1987) and Davies and Bentahila (2012) all support the idea of Arabic societies being high-context cultures in which meaning is embedded more in the context than in the language used. In spite of the oversimplification stemming from dichotomizing cultural patterns, Hall's (1976) model continues to be used by communication scholars, partly because the model makes complex differences in communication understandable. However, it has to be acknowledged that this model is reductionist, as it tends to simplify/overstate cultural differences. According to Kubota (1999),

describing cultural differences involves complex issues that necessitate critical scrutiny. She explains that labels used to represent cultures are 'produced, reinforced and contested by discourses' that manifest power struggle between cultures, which calls into question any oversimplification of the relationship between language and culture (ibid: 11). Therefore, total reliance on Hall's (1976) model to explain cultural difference cannot be accepted, especially in today's interconnected world.

Honour is another frequent theme in studies of Arabic intercultural communication patterns. It is claimed that Arabs appreciate the notion of face and honour, which is crucial for an understanding of the Arab culture. Therefore, asking for clarification, which is considered one of the powerful tools in co-construction of understanding in ELF (Kaur, 2009), is usually avoided (Davies and Bentahila, 2012). Wilkins (2001: 263) advises British teachers who have to deal with Arabic students to place them in classrooms with 'strangers' as they will not ask for clarification if they do not understand, and will be wary about showing their weaknesses in front of their colleagues.

Another way of saving face is the claimed indirectness of Arabic communication. Pölzl and Seidlhofer (2006: 164) discuss the Arabic folk-linguistic term *musayara*, which refers to 'going with' or 'accompanying' a partner in a conversation. It is related to an other-oriented, 'humouring', 'conciliatory' attitude, with individuals' efforts to preserve harmony in social relations. *Musayara* can involve any conversational strategy of saving face and avoiding conflict, i.e. manoeuvres which 'enhance commonalities rather than differences, co-operation rather than conflict and mutuality rather than self-assertion'. *Musayara* is often employed to express refusal or disapproval in an indirect way in order not to give rise to conflict (ibid.). This indirectness, if not understood, may lead to communication breakdown, as the messages would seem ambiguous to a non-Arab. However, from an ELF perspective, *Musayara* can be seen in a more positive light as being a collaborative strategy.

Overlaps in Arabs' speech also seem to be an interesting matter in research to date. Nydell (1987) states that Arabic speakers display frequent overlaps and a high rate of speech. However,

in support of her claim that first language culture can be overridden in ELF interactions, Meierkord (2002) uses Tariq, an Arabic participant, as an illustrative example from her data. He showed fewer overlaps than speakers from non-Arabic countries. Based on this evidence it seems that Tariq exhibits a discourse style which is atypical of his culture. However, in contrast with Meierkord's (2002) findings in this regard, in Pölzl and Seidlhofer's (2006) data, overlaps occur very frequently. They argue that in spite of the unsmooth turn-taking, communication is continuous as it follows its own rhythm based on local cultural norms, which the speakers have no reservations about adhering to in their own habitat. When a speaker is interrupted, communication does not suffer from misunderstandings or breakdown, but rather it continues to flow at high speed. Thus, they conclude that appropriate turn-taking management is a pragmatic phenomenon that follows different norms in different places. Arabic ELF speakers apply their first communicative norms effectively and uniquely, and in this respect retain their cultural identities and remain true to themselves.

The discrepancy between the findings of Meierkord (2002) and Pölzl and Seidlhofer (2006) can be explained based on what the latter call the 'habitat factor'. By habitat Pölzl and Seidlhofer (ibid.: 155) mean 'the setting which interlocutors recognize as their own (their natural habitat)'. Pölzl and Seidlhofer argue that ELF speakers in their 'natural' habitat are more likely to linguistically signal their cultural allegiances than those who are in an alien environment. Being faced with the intrinsic insecurity of intercultural communication, the latter are likely to be more disposed to accommodate others' norms, especially the prevailing local ones, i.e. to behave exonymously. This research project took place in the 'natural habitat' of the majority of the participants. Therefore, it is worth seeing what the findings reveal about the natural habitat in terms of adherence to L1 cultural practices.

Looking at the aforementioned characteristics of Arabic intercultural communication and the extensive research that investigates the use of the first language cultural practices to intercultural communication, it can be strongly argued that communication in ELF is not culturally neutral. In an attempt to bridge the cultural gaps that may supposedly hinder communication in ELF, Baker (2008) proposes the notion of Intercultural Awareness (ICA). He defines ICA as follows:

a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication (Baker, 2008: 7).

According to Baker, ICA offers a means of conceptualizing the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for successful intercultural communication. ICA can have even more relevance and importance in a cultural context that is very often characterized as 'high-context' such as Saudi Arabia. However, since this study draws on the community of practice (CoP) model as a framework to study BELF, there are additional aspects and variables that need to be considered to understand the role of culture in BELF communication. This is the focus of the next chapter.

2.8 Summary

In an attempt to provide a comprehensive background of the current status of English in the world, this chapter started by discussing the various reasons that led to the unprecedented spread of English to an around the world. It then moved on to sketch out some of the most important models that have been put forward for this spread of English. As a specific context of this research, this chapter focused on English in the countries of the GCC from the particular perspective of its historical background and its current ethno-linguistic scene. After that, this chapter discussed at some length two of the most widely used paradigms of English in its international role, the paradigm of WE and ELF. It then moved to detail how ELF has been defined so far by various scholars in the field. The focus of this chapter then moved to the role of ELF in intercultural communication, with reference to the role of language in business intercultural communication in general, and how intercultural communication has been researched in Saudi Arabia so far.

Chapter 3 Multinational Corporations as a BELF Community of Practice

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter argued that communication in ELF is not culturally neutral, as English as a lingua franca (ELF) expresses its speakers' cultural resources, often in a creative and 'blended' way. As this research is rooted in business settings where other variables exert a strong influence, a contextualized approach to ELF needs to be adopted. Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) believe that traditional frameworks for characterizing national cultures do not necessarily apply to business organizations. Such organizations present an additional dimension to 'culture', which Wang (2001) calls 'professional cultures'. Wang (*ibid.*: 4) explains that 'professions create and sustain relatively unique work cultures'. A professional culture, to a greater or lesser degree, unites members of a profession to form a professional community, guarantees the continuance of a profession as a group collectivity, and leads the members to think and behave similarly as the profession requires. A professional culture can exist across the boundaries of organizations, industries or nations. In international business, as a professional culture, work in cross-functional teams brings together members of different national and organizational cultures. These professional cultures represent a form which is known as communities of practice (CoP). According to Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009), the types of cultural references of a CoP are likely to be much more limited in scope than those of some other types of groups, and are less likely to include the deeper manifestations of values, beliefs and ideologies. Therefore, newcomers to a community of practice may have less difficulty integrating in the 'different culture', because the range of types of cultural differences that they need to adjust to will probably be smaller.

From an ELF perspective, conceptualizing ELF users by applying the CoP notion was first suggested by House (2003), who believes that Wenger's (1998: 76) three dimensions typifying CoPs: mutual engagement, a joint negotiated enterprise, and a shared repertoire of negotiable resources, 'may indeed be applicable to ELF interactions'. The validity of the CoP notion as a framework for analysing ELF is also suggested by Jenkins (2007), Seidlhofer (2007a), and Dewey

(2007, 2009). These suggestions served as a starting point for consequent research, but empirical studies that test its value remain scarce. The most notable contributions are those of Smit (2009, 2010) in the field of higher education, and, of more direct relevance to my research, those of Ehrenreich (2009, 2010) in the field of multinational business.

This chapter starts by discussing the CoP model, with particular reference to how sociolinguistic research, as well as how ELF research, have employed this framework. Then, it presents the concept of business English as a lingua franca (BELF), the main focus of this research study, with particular reference to how it can be studied by applying the CoP framework. This chapter then discusses the role of BELF and other languages in the workplace. Finally, it sketches out some of the BELF users' perceptions regarding BELF, and regarding the participation of NESs in BELF interactions.

3.2 The community of practice model

The concept of CoP arose as a result of Lave's ethnographic work among Vai tailors in Liberia (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger (1991) coined the term 'community of practice' to better describe the kind of learning that underlies apprenticeship. They believe that even though the term is a recent coinage, the phenomenon is age-old. Wenger (2006: 1) defines CoPs as 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly'. Similarly, Meyerhoff (2002: 530) defines a CoP as 'an aggregate of individuals' negotiating and learning practices that contribute to the satisfaction of a common goal'. In general, Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) describe a CoP as a group whose members are mutually involved in the realization of some jointly negotiated enterprise with the help of a shared repertoire of negotiable resources.

These three core dimensions of CoPs require some elaboration. 'Mutual engagement' means regular interactions (Langman, 2003), and it requires discovering how to engage in the community, the development of dense relationships, and defining identities (Wenger, 1998).

Ehrenreich (2009) states that the group of business executives in her study were all

simultaneously members in several CoPs, each one formed to meet respective enterprise or project-related needs. These regular interactions can happen face-to-face in different settings (in their offices, in corridors, during meetings, over lunch, or coffee) or through various channels of telecommunication (phone, email, Internet). The second dimension is the 'joint enterprise', or what Smit (2010: 382) calls 'institutionalized purposes', the members' shared goals and the practices involved in achieving these (Langman, 2003). These emerge as the members' collectively negotiated responses to what they perceive as their situation (Wenger, 1998), and they involve the members struggling to define their enterprise, their engagement with the enterprise and their learning to become accountable and to hold each other to account in the enterprise (ibid.). Ehrenreich (2009) argues that the overall goal of business CoPs is the corporations' basic objective of making a profit.

Finally, and most importantly for the purpose of this study, the production of a 'shared repertoire of negotiable resources' involves linguistic routines, specialized terminology, ways of doing things, ways of talking, stories, jokes, concepts, physical artefacts, instruments and costumes (Wenger, 1998). Ehrenreich (2009) notes that the shared repertoires which have been developed by the group of managers she studied include German, English and many other languages, as well as documents such as drawings, charts, PowerPoint presentations and models of different parts of their products. Such resources, according to Wenger (1998), require the participants to renegotiate the meaning of various elements, and to produce, adopt, adapt and import new language, and to create routines. Therefore, it can be argued that within CoPs, the shared goals, shared repertoire of practices, and the forms of mutual engagement, are under continuous negotiation, which means they are defined and redefined in practice by the communities' members. This continuous negotiation is compatible with ELF negotiation and co-construction of meaning, which has been identified as a key aspect of lingua franca interaction (e.g. Mauranen and Ranta, 2009).

The process in which the members coordinate their actions and views with those of the other members necessarily involves learning (Smit, 2010). The CoP, as one element of a social theory of learning, offers a different view of learning than some traditional models offer (Wenger, 1998).

Within CoPs, learning has four key aspects: it occurs in practice; it takes place in the context of communities to which one belongs; it involves the construction of identities in relation to the group; and finally, it involves the construction and internalization of meaning, which implies that it is a form of experiencing (ibid.). Lave and Wenger (1991: 12) describe learning within CoPs in terms of 'legitimate peripheral participation'. The notion is meant to imply a gradual shift along the four key aspects of learning: from the 'periphery' of the community to the 'core', from the status of a 'novice' or newcomer to that of an 'expert' member, and from lack of appropriate competencies and expertise to high levels of competence and expertise. Therefore, in Wenger's (1998) terms, learning in CoPs can be summarized as changing participation and transforming identity through a joint enterprise and through mutual engagement by participants (See also Kalocsai, 2014). The application of the CoP model in sociolinguistic research is the focus of the next section.

3.2.1 Communities of practice in sociolinguistic research

The first use of the CoP concept in linguistic research came from Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992). They argue, convincingly, for the need to examine the analytical potential of the CoP for the field of language and gender research. They define a CoP as

an aggregate of people who come together around in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour. As a social construct, a community of practice is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 464).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a number of sociolinguists adopted and successfully applied the notion as an analytical tool (see Meyerhoff, 2002 for an overview). Bucholtz (1999) asserts that by recognizing practice – the social projects of participants – as the motivating factor for linguistic interaction, the CoP framework makes activity much more central to sociolinguistic analysis. Instead of investing language with a special analytic status, the CoP framework sees language as one of many social practices in which participants engage. Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999: 175) observe that the notion's great strength is in offering a 'framework of definitions within which to examine the ways in which becoming a member of a CoP with the processes of gaining control of the discourse appropriate to it'. To Bucholtz (1999), the CoP has a greater value for sociolinguistic work than its alternative, the speech community, for several reasons. The CoP

allows greater flexibility in the type of social practices around which a community can be built. It also allows greater examination of difference, conflict, and individual variation within the community. The CoP acknowledges the internal heterogeneity of the community members, which is an inherent characteristic of ELF communities. Moreover, it opens up a way to examine individual variation and agency. It also allows the active construction, or rejection, of identities and various other social meanings in the ongoing process of practice. Finally, it gives preference to local interpretations based on emic perspectives, which is especially relevant in the case of ELF, as discussed in section [3.2.2](#). Considering this theoretical backdrop, Bucholtz (ibid.) argues that sociolinguists can reverse the direction of analyses. So, in addition to asking how social information accounts for linguistic phenomena, they may also ask how linguistic data informs the social world.

In the field of sociolinguistics, the CoP signifies an improvement over the concept of speech community by addressing both the social and the linguistic aspects of the discipline (Bucholtz, 1999; also highlighted as an advantage in ELF research, e.g. in Ehrenreich, 2010; Smit, 2010). Additionally, the CoP presents an integrated approach to sociolinguistic analysis. By understanding socially meaningful language use as practices linked to different communities, the model enables sociolinguistic researchers to provide comprehensive linguistic descriptions, along with social explanations of certain social groups. According to Ehrenreich (2009), this heavily contextualized approach to both language and society is one of the many strengths of CoP as a sociolinguistic framework. The application of the CoP model in ELF research is the focus of the next section.

3.2.2 Communities of practice and ELF research

The CoP as an analytical framework is quite new in the field of ELF. As mentioned above, the first suggestion to treat the ELF community as constituting a CoP came from House (2003), and then from Jenkins (2007) and Seidlhofer (2007a). ELF researchers realize the merits of the notion of CoP in that it allows the investigation of linguistically heterogeneous, temporary, and usually dislocated communities, which cannot be linked with a linguistic variety in a traditional sense. Therefore, based on careful consideration of the fact that ELF is, by definition, multilingual, and

that ELF speakers use neither a codified variety of their own, nor aspire to NS norms, it can be argued that the CoP framework best suits the lingua franca contexts (Smit, 2010).

However, treating ELF speakers as constituting an ELF CoP only on the basis of using ELF is not how this framework should be applied when conducting research. Ehrenreich (2009) appropriately draws attention to the problematic nature of such an approach. First, using the CoP framework as a theoretical background, when comprehensive and empirically grounded explorations of this concept are limited, is problematic, and may create an 'empirical gap' (ibid.: 136). Second, describing an ELF CoP only on the basis of using ELF glosses over the discontinuities that are integral to the structure of CoPs. Therefore, it may be reconsidered as 'constellations of interconnected practices' (Wenger, 1998: 127). Finally, considering Wenger's (ibid.: 123) definition, speaking or using ELF is too broad in scope, and too abstract to 'represent a meaningful and explanatorily productive' joint enterprise (Ehrenreich, 2009: 134). Thus, Ehrenreich (ibid.) accepts that ELF speakers can usefully be conceptualized as members of CoPs, but argues that such a conceptualization must be built on empirically grounded evidence in local CoPs that have more of a specific 'joint enterprise'. Based on the limited empirical data currently available (Ehrenreich, 2009, 2010; Smit, 2009, 2010; Kalocsai 2009, 2014), it seems that ELF speakers who are in regular contact with each other and share a common goal are capable of creating an ELF CoP with their own linguistic norms, which are negotiated and constructed on-line, but more work in local contexts is needed.

In previous research into BELF, the concept of a discourse community has been applied for analyses of BELF discourse looking at the business interactants' shared knowledge of the forms and the goals of their interactions (cf. Louhiala-Salminen, 2002). Nevertheless, in order to explore the perceptions and attitudes of BELF users, the concept of CoP, with its emphasis on the notion of 'practice', can bring about a perspective that is more in line with the members' own frames of reference (Ehrenreich, 2010: 415).

3.3 Business English as a lingua franca (BELF)

The predominance of English used as a lingua franca in international business contexts is now beyond dispute. Studies around the world all confirm that English is an intrinsic part of communication in multinational settings and a fact of life for many business people (Nickerson, 2005). The fact that many multinational companies in Europe have replaced local languages with English as the official corporate language is an example of how dominant English has become in international business (Kankaanranta and Planken, 2010). This shift is justified considering the European Commission's announcement, in 2008, of the agreement whereby English would be the official language of the European Union. The adoption of English as a corporate language seems to be inevitable for all business institutions that attempt to compete internationally as global players. Charles (2007), who investigates the use of BELF in European contexts, believes that companies in non-English speaking European countries are just like companies in other non-English speaking countries in that they face 'formidable challenges as they attempt to operate globally in a language that is not their mother tongue' (p. 261).

Speakers of English for business purposes use the language as a tool to achieve certain business-related goals. Therefore, according to Ellis and Johnson (1994), the language of business has several particular characteristics. The most important feature of Business English is a 'sense of purpose'. Language is used to achieve a specific end, and its successful use is seen in terms of a successful outcome to the business transaction or event. They state that people worldwide conduct business meetings in English, even though English may be a 'foreign language' to all those involved (ibid.: 9). 'The language that they use will be neither as rich in vocabulary and expression, nor as culture-bound, as that used by native speakers, but will be based on a core of the most useful and basic structures and vocabulary' (ibid.: 9). Ellis and Johnson adopt a position different from that taken in ELF research, as there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the vocabulary in ELF interactions can be very rich, in fact richer than ENL contexts of use because of the multilingual nature of the linguistic resources being deployed. Nevertheless, Ellis and Johnson's description of English being free from any cultural attachment to NESs demonstrates its dominance as a form of ELF in business settings.

The concept of ELF, by definition, involves its use by speakers of different first languages, but it does not distinguish its purpose or domain of use in any way. Since such a distinction is seen as highly relevant for investigating business and corporate communication, Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* (2005) introduced the notion of BELF to focus on business ELF situations, to explore and discuss issues related to the English used in business, to highlight the purpose of communication, and to distinguish the domains of use. BELF thus specifically addresses the shared language facility used in professional communication in global business. In other words, the 'B', i.e. the business context, accentuates its difference from ELF. BELF is a relatively neutral code that is shared among the members of the international business community for the function of working in multinational companies and doing business (Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta, 2012). Building on the concept of ELF, Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* (2005) argue that BELF refers to English used as a shared and neutral communication code. BELF is shared in the sense that it is used for doing business within the global business discourse community, 'whose members are BELF users and communicators in their own right', not NNEs or language learners; and it is neutral in the sense that none of its users can claim ownership of it as a mother tongue (*ibid.*: 404). For the conceptualization of BELF, the 'B' is of ultimate importance, since BELF is used in the business world to get the job done (Charles, 2007).

The term BELF seems to be more appropriate than English for specific business purposes (ESBP), which is the term often used to describe the English taught in Business English classes (Nickerson, 2005). Choosing the term BELF indicates an attempt to focus attention on the fact that ELF speakers in the business domain are language users as opposed to language learners. As Firth (2009: 158) argues, speakers in workplace interactions, where the overall goal is not to improve language proficiency, 'strive through the interaction to avoid any suggestion of "learner" status'.

In BELF, the frame of reference is provided by the globalized business community. Charles (2007: 264) explains that the 'B' of BELF is the 'sociopragmatic' backdrop against which language – and any anomalies in it – should be interpreted. The global business community can be referred to as 'the "culture" that has created BELF, and within which BELF evolves'. Charles adds that

the culture of global business is diverse and dynamic, just like all cultural phenomena. However, in an attempt to give rise to the concept of BELF, which she (along with Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta in their 2005 seminal article) has presented to the field of business communication, Charles (2007) misrepresents what ELF is and what ELF research is about. She argues that 'ELF researchers tend to be more language than communication oriented— seeing linguistic skills as the crucial factor in communication—whereas BELF researchers see communication skills as crucial' (ibid.: 123). According to Charles' faulty interpretation of ELF, successful ELF interactions are created through NS-like language use and linguistic competence, whereas research has shown that success in BELF is based on language use appropriate for the needs and requirements of the communicative event. Similarly, in spite of the mounting evidence to the contrary, she argues that, ELF users aim to emulate NS discourse, and NNEs in ELF research are seen as 'sources of trouble and learners' (ibid.). Furthermore, 'culture', in Charles' view of ELF, refers to the national cultures of NESs, whereas in BELF, culture is based on the diversity of the globalized business community. Looking at the above superficial overview of the differences, it seems that Charles strives to give more recognition to the concept of BELF over ELF and to ensure a clear distinction between the two approaches. Instead of accepting that BELF is a variation of ELF, Charles (ibid.: 266) seems to attribute the qualities that make ELF popular to BELF and criticizes ELF researchers for building their research around 'a fictitious NS', a criticism that is far from reality.

3.3.1 BELF users and communities of practice

Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) present three contextual factors which appear to be relevant features of BELF discourse: 'the shared business domain of BELF use, the shared special field of expertise, and the length of the relationship with the communication partner'. These three characteristics are very similar to the core dimensions of CoPs as explained below.

First, Kankaanranta and Planken (2010: 394) argue that the business domain, with its inherent 'profit-oriented principles, goal-based genres and task-related, time-constrained processes', mainly represents implicit knowledge, which is shared within the business discourse community. As one of their interviewees noted, BELF is 'more purposeful, task-oriented and persuasive [than

general English]’ and ‘they don’t teach you that in courses’ (ibid.: 394). This ‘purposefulness’ of BELF discourse is in line with the notion of ‘joint enterprise’, a core dimension in CoPs. This orientation towards the ‘joint enterprise’ is translated into purposeful language use in a BELF discourse community.

According to Kankaanranta and Planken (2010), the second contextual feature that is seen as relevant for BELF discourse is the shared professional area of expertise involving special concepts and terminology, as used by the relevant discourse community. The authors state that as one’s own knowledge of the field deepens and thus expertise increases, it also helps communication with the colleagues who are not considered competent BELF users. Therefore, the majority of their interviewees described BELF communication about work-related issues with those sharing knowledge about the domain as relatively effortless, whereas communication with non-experts was experienced as challenging. This shared expertise of business-related discourse is one of the dominant findings in most BELF research (e.g. Louhiala-Salminen *et al.*, 2005; Charles, 2007), and it is clearly comparable to the most relevant dimension of CoPs, which is the shared repertoire of negotiable resources, involving linguistic routines, specialized terminology, ways of doing things, and ways of talking. It is important to note here that the business-related vocabulary, the technical jargon and the knowledge of the relevant genres used in BELF are perceived as highly specialized and unique to their areas of expertise. Therefore, BELF discourse is not considered easily accessible to non-experts. Kankaanranta and Planken’s (2010) BELF users assert that communication about one’s own expertise with non-experts is seen as challenging. In light of such challenges, the need for the use of accommodating strategies, such as paraphrasing and comprehension-checking (see section [4.3](#) for a detailed discussion of ELF communicative strategies), in BELF seems greater. In spite of the undisputed importance of communication skills in general and BELF skills in particular, business professionals’ managerial or technical expertise still comes first (Ehrenreich, 2010). In business CoPs, English is only one tool in the business professional’s toolkit, enabling international communication and is, as such, part of the communities’ shared repertoires, as discussed earlier. However, the necessary professional skills are directly related to the communities’ core activities, their ‘joint enterprises’, and this is what really is considered to be important to be successful; business English is ‘a means to an end’ (ibid.: 428).

The third relevant feature for BELF discourse is the significance placed on the length of the business relationship. Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) find that the better a user knows the other party, the better they know what kind of communication to expect from them and how to communicate, and this reflects the distinctiveness of BELF interactions. Because BELF is influenced by the speaker's professional expertise, English proficiency, accent, and the discourse practices of the speaker's mother tongue, it takes time to get used to the idiosyncratic mixture of these features. Although not directly, this feature of BELF discourse is parallel to 'mutual engagement' as a core dimension of CoPs, which involves regular interactions and requires discovering how to engage in the community, the development of dense relationships, and defining identities. Therefore, it can be said that 'at least some of this business knowledge is likely to remain hidden from outsiders to the domain and initially from novice, aspiring business professionals' (ibid.: 393). Kankaanranta and Planken found that 'the best school to learn BELF is the real-life practice' (ibid.), which connotes that BELF expertise can be gained through social learning without having 'learning' itself as an objective. In the next section, I discuss previous research into BELF.

3.3.2 Research into BELF

BELF research is the interface of two larger fields: ELF research and business communication research (Ehrenreich, 2010; Santner-Wolfartsberger, 2009). This in part explains the fact that most of the early BELF research comes from the field of business communication. However, some ELF researchers have recently shifted attention to the international business domain as a specific context of use for ELF. The best examples are Cogo (2014), Ehrenreich (2009, 2010, 2011) and Santner-Wolfartsberger (2009) who adopt BELF as a term to highlight the uniqueness of business as a domain of use. Although some ELF researchers have based their research in business settings (e.g. Rogerson-Revell, 1999, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Pitzl, 2010), the distinctiveness of the business context has not been identified in their findings. Surprisingly, Rogerson-Revell's (2008) BELF study of performance in international business meetings still uses NS standards to evaluate the language performance of business professionals. In contrast, the majority of research into BELF is pursuing an avenue more in line with ELF conceptual

underpinnings. Pitzl (2010), for instance, analyses the management of non-understandings in ELF business conversations, but she asserts that her findings are applicable to any ELF situation and not more relevant to the business context.

In her editorial to the 2005 Special Issue of *English for Specific Purposes*, Nickerson (2005: 369) argues that there are two distinct trends in BELF research. First, there is a 'discursive turn'; a shift from the analysis of isolated business texts in the form of genres to the analysis of highly contextualized communication (e.g. Poncini, 2004) and second, the focus has shifted from language skills to language strategies, i.e. identification of strategies that make the communicative event successful regardless of the first language of the English speaker (e.g. Planken, 2005).

A number of themes can be identified as the most dominant in BELF research. These themes include: (a) the use of English at work and raising questions like why, when, how much, with whom, about what (e.g. Ehrenreich, 2009, 2010; Kankaanranta and Planken, 2010); (b) the nature of English communication, including intercultural characteristics, differences and similarities between speakers (e.g. Charles, 2007; Louhiala-Salminen *et al.*, 2005; Poncini, 2007); (c) the notion of 'success' in BELF communication, the individual and situational factors that contribute to or hinder such success and the strategies that individuals use to optimize their BELF communication in the interests of success (e.g. Firth, 1996, 2009; Pitzl, 2010; Poncini, 2007). The next sections of this chapter and Chapter 4 discuss the findings of this research.

3.3.3 BELF and other languages at the workplace

Although, as stated earlier in section [2.7.1](#), the role of language is not given sufficient consideration in corporate communication research, the use and choice of English as a corporate language has been an important theme in the literature on language in MNCs. Marschan-Piekkari *et al.* (1999) report its advantages as facilitating formal reporting, enhancing informal communication and information flow, and assisting in developing a common corporate culture. Vaara *et al.* (2005) investigate the role of corporate language choice in a merger between a

Swedish and a Finnish firm. Although a common corporate language (English) was chosen to facilitate integration and communication, in reality this was interpreted as a political choice by the organization whose language was not chosen. This resulted in disintegration rather than integration. While the introduction of a corporate language might facilitate communication, Fredriksson *et al.* (2006: 409) indicate 'it will not render the firm monolingual'. Fredriksson *et al.* (ibid.: 123) studied the use of corporate language in three organizational units of Siemens. They found that although English was designated the official corporate language, in practice both English and German were used frequently. This finding is similar to Ehrenreich's (2009, 2010), who found that even when the corporate language is officially English, it is rarely used within German-only groups.

Gerritsen and Nickerson (2009) state that globally operating business people all seem to need at least two languages to do their work: their mother tongue and English. However, the distribution and relative levels of use of the two languages in daily work varied substantially; on average, Gerritsen and Nickerson estimate that employees use their mother tongue marginally more than English, even if English is officially their corporate language. Some of their interviewees were so used to using English in the workplace that they felt that their professional expertise was stronger in English. Although only a small number of their participants needed a third language in their work, the added value of knowing the other party's mother tongue was considered high, especially in building rapport in new relationships (see Planken, 2005 for similar findings). Furthermore, 'communication is likely to work best if several languages are at their disposal when interacting with employees and clients' (Steyaert *et al.*, 2011: 273). Therefore, linguistic diversity in MNCs in non-Anglophone countries can probably be regarded as a competitive advantage. Similarly, Ehrenreich (2010) states that from a corporate perspective, the importance of other languages as valuable strategic resources is evidently recognized. English may be the necessary tool facilitating international communication, but to achieve a range of specific business tasks successfully, speaking other languages is crucial.

In a study that investigates multilingual organizations as 'linguascapes', Steyaert *et al.* (2011) identify five discursive practices, namely the varied ways of making sense concerning the

phenomenon of language use in MNCs. The first discursive practice is what they call 'adaptation to the viable language of a certain location' (ibid.: 123). This practice relies upon a spatial dimension, as it is expected that the local, national or even global space indicates which language(s) should be spoken. Therefore, an alignment is clearly constructed between language use and location/territory. 'Adaptation to the language of the other interlocutor is a second discursive practice' (ibid.). This describes people's need to adjust to their interlocutors. It is a temporary concept of aligning oneself with the language spoken by the person one is interacting with. This suggests that speakers will adopt the language of an interlocutor from one situation to another, if they happen to know the language the interlocutor is speaking. A third discursive practice is what Steyaert *et al.* (ibid.: 274) term 'collective negotiation of a common language'. In this situation, depending on the event and people involved, there is 'an active moment of negotiation about the question of which common language to use'. In a fourth discursive practice, it is suggested that languages can be used simultaneously. If it is possible that everyone participates in their preferred language, a situation occurs where various languages are mixed. 'Finding a compromise through a third language' is the fifth and most common discursive practice that employees refer to when it seems feasible to agree to adopt a language other than the mother tongue of both interlocutors involved in the communication (ibid.: 275). This solution is seen as a common platform to work from. As the language is not the mother tongue for either speaker, they refer to it as a third language, and they assert that it is usually English. Steyaert *et al.* present these scenarios as though it is easy to differentiate between settings in this way; they do not acknowledge that sometimes the setting implies that different scenarios can be happening at once. However, their characterization of this third language is a clear reference to the state of ELF being the dominant discursive practice in MNCs.

In the literature, English as a corporate language has variously been described not only as a facilitator which alleviates communication problems, but also as a challenge, and even a barrier that impedes communication for those who do not speak it or whose proficiency is limited (Charles and Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Marschan *et al.*, 1997). Nonetheless, according to Ehrenreich (2010) the characterizations of English in this literature are varied and full of perceptive insights. Its role as facilitator is appreciated in situations in which it is only through English that conducting business is made possible in the first place.

3.3.4 Intercultural communication in BELF

Of important relevance to BELF research are intercultural communication studies that examine contact situations between speakers from different linguacultural backgrounds, especially those in which English is used as the lingua franca. The main drive of the majority of these studies is to find differences and identify potential communication problems among participants, resulting from different cultural practices being in contact. Some of these studies examined interactions between business people from different 'national cultures' (Marriott, 1997; Miller, 2000; Spencer-Oatey, 2000). Marriott (1997), for example, claims that in Australian-Japanese negotiations, the Japanese and the Australian participants built very different understandings of the exact event on the basis of their different experiences and cultural backgrounds. Spencer-Oatey (2000) explains how a Chinese delegation's visit to the United Kingdom went wrong as a result of a mutual lack of awareness of cultural norms, especially regarding issues of face saving and threatening.

Other studies focus on the differences between cultural groups, using more generic – or problematic, in my view – labels for these groups (e.g. Westerners, Asians, etc.). Bilbow (1997, 2002), for instance, applies speech act theory to look at commissive speech acts (e.g. promises and expressions of commitment) in business meetings between Western expatriates and local Chinese staff at a mega corporation in Hong Kong. Bilbow (1997) found some differences in the way commissive speech acts were used and realized, between Western and Chinese participants. He observed that national culture and organizational practices played a role in the strategic choices made by the speakers, and also the linguistic realizations they choose. His findings indicate that different cultural groups understand 'discoursal features' differently. He claims that most of these differences are rooted in the underlying Western cultural versus Confucianist values.

Similarly, Rogerson-Revell (1999), also using generic labels of Asians versus Westerners, identifies different interactive strategies in intercultural business meetings. She also studied a Hong Kong-based international corporation, and examined four management meetings.

Rogerson-Revell (ibid.) observed the interactive strategies employed by the speakers and found

that positive face-saving strategies were employed to increase social cohesion and 'interdependence between speakers' (p. 346). She also found that differences in interactive style depend on what each individual considers 'appropriate' communicative behaviour. What is appropriate, according to her, is determined by a mix of sociocultural factors. In this regard, Rogerson-Revell's conclusions are in line with those of Bilbow (1997) in the sense that sociocultural differences can explain miscommunication. Rogerson-Revell (1999) asserts that if the same interactive strategies were shared by a number of participants in a meeting, this resulted in a certain type of interactive style dominating 'to the advantage of the "in-group" users and the detriment of other 'non-users' (p. 63).

The research discussed above generally takes a differentiated position to the notion of 'culture', and it can be criticized for overemphasizing national culture and cultural differences. The studies cited above highlight miscommunication, and ignore what contributes to successful intercultural communication. However, a shift in the orientation of intercultural communication research is currently taking place (Koester, 2010). A clear example is Poncini (2002, 2004b, 2007) who presents her research agenda as follows:

... rather than focusing on miscommunication, the focus will be on what seems to work at the meetings. This could shed light on the features of interactants' language use that may contribute to overcoming or diminishing the difficulties often associated with intercultural communication. This in turn could allow a greater understanding of the characteristics of successful business communication in multicultural settings ... (Poncini, 2002: 350).

This reorientation, which emphasizes 'what seems to work', is very much at the heart of recent studies of ELF in general and BELF in particular (Koester, 2010). As Seidlhofer (2001: 141) argues, ELF speakers have a pragmatic approach towards English: 'They are not primarily concerned with emulating the way native speakers use their mother tongue . . . Instead, the central concerns for this domain are efficiency, relevance and economy'. This view is in marked contrast to Charles (2007) and it is clearly echoed in most BELF research. BELF researchers remark that the choice of English for international business communication is a pragmatic decision (Ehrenreich, 2009, 2010; Charles, 2007; Louhiala-Salminen *et al.*, 2005) and they

consider English as one 'tool' in a business toolkit (Ehrenreich, 2010: 427). The next section highlights the most important linguistic characteristics of BELF as reported in the literature to date.

3.3.5 BELF users' perceptions of communicating in BELF

After exploring what the previous research has to say about NNEs' use of English, it seems worthwhile to survey what previous research into BELF says about BELF users' own perceptions of communicating in English as NNEs. BELF research reports that BELF users have a generally positive attitude toward using English in multinational business. Ehrenreich (2010) explains that the generally pragmatic attitude towards BELF is further substantiated by her participants' answers concerning the importance they attribute to correct English. Aside from what they call important written texts, which include contracts or official texts meant to be presented to the wider public (e.g. published annual reports and websites), conformity with ENL is seen as an irrelevant concept. Moreover, even with these important written texts, it seems that correctness is actually seen as only a matter of prestige (Seidlhofer *et al.*, 2006). By presenting to the public English texts that conform to Standard English, a business organization attempts to demonstrate its professional image as a leader on a global scale. Other than that, what counts in the world of different varieties and different levels of proficiency is the language's function of transmitting information both effectively and efficiently across language boundaries (Louhiala-Salminen *et al.*, 2005).

However, this generally positive attitude does not necessarily indicate that communication always flows smoothly. Some of the challenges and problems reported in the previous research are similar across professions and regions (cf. Blazejewski, 2006; Charles, 2007; Charles and Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Louhiala-Salminen *et al.*, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007, 2008). For example, some perceived difficulties are caused by business people who only have very basic or no knowledge of English, and with whom communication is only doable via interpreters. These interpreters may not be sufficiently familiar with the subject matter, which constitutes a challenge to getting the job done. In terms of regions, this is mostly the case in countries such as China and Russia, and, regarding age, it usually happens with more senior business partners as well as internally at the lower levels of the organization (Blazejewski, 2006). It will be interesting to see

what the findings of this research study will reveal in this regard, especially in terms of internal communication.

Coping with different levels of proficiency is reported as challenging. Partly because of these challenges, ELF interactions are described as being more tiring and also taking longer than those in a speaker's mother tongue (Planken, 2005). Interactions in English are also reported to be more disposed to what sometimes proves to be a substantial loss of details, potentially leading to delays in a process or extra costs. Although most business professionals, during the course of the mutual engagement in their international careers, acquire a large repertoire of coping interactional and pragmatic strategies, such as comprehension checks, asking for clarification and repetition, attention to facial expression; when and where to apply these depends on more than just linguistic considerations. Situational and task-specific variables in addition to the issue of face may sometimes hinder the use of these strategies (Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen, 2010).

Generally, BELF communication about technical and professional matters is reported to be mastered with relative ease. This can be understood considering the fact that the business CoPs' shared repertoires have additional communicative aids such as documents, drawings, etc. (Ehrenreich, 2010), in addition to the shared business jargon discussed in section [3.3.1](#) above. However, talking about personal or more emotional issues and dealing with conflict are areas where linguistic inability is felt the most (Fredriksson *et al.*, 2007). Charles (2007) reports that her participants have difficulties in finding the right expressions in ordinary small talk, acting assertively in negotiations, and having the ability to suddenly and effectively express opinions or communicate nuances in meetings.

Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) report that some less competent BELF users are frustrated by having to use 'simplified English'. This not so fluent English affected their professional identities. They quote one of their participants who said: 'I'm usually a very outgoing person, but not in English. I feel much smaller in meetings' (p. 393). Another interviewee admitted to being frustrated with the practice of having English as the corporate language, as it affected his

personality and professional impact (ibid.). Charles (2007) argues that if this sense of dissatisfaction is felt by a large number of the employees, it can be disturbing to the general organizational climate. She explains that 'language is a very personal thing; if people, on a daily basis, face situations where they feel deprived of their ability to communicate and express themselves adequately', there will be a feeling of frustration and a struggle to maintain self-respect and dignity, which will ultimately affect their personal productivity and, eventually, reflect on the organization's overall productivity. I expect this to be an issue in my research as well, at least to an extent. As explained in section [2.7.2](#), concerns about one's face in intercultural communication that involves Arabs are frequently reported.

Interestingly, there is a general consensus among business professionals that there is always room for improving their language skills; a willingness to develop their English language further, by official language training or by practice, is clearly stated in more than one instance (cf. Charles and Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Charles, 2007; Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen, 2010). The necessary BELF skills are either acquired through exposure and interaction in the course of mutual engagement in the business CoPs with other international colleagues and business partners, or through official language training. However, a sense of dissatisfaction with conventional business English training methods is frequently reported (cf. Charles and Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Ehrenreich 2009, 2010). Generally, business professionals frequently reported that the CoP-based approach of learning by doing or learning through practice is a more efficient way of acquiring the language and communication skills actually needed in the daily routines of business, which adds to the significance of applying the CoP framework to the study.

3.3.5.1 BELF speakers and identity

Joseph (2004) discusses the importance of language in the construction of identity, proposing that identity itself is a linguistic phenomenon, in which language is inseparable from identity. He argues that language both creates and also signals cultural identity which makes languages 'culturally 'loaded'' (ibid.: 167). Jenkins (2007) explains that linguistic identity is a complex aspect that cannot be separated from other phenomena, such as language attitudes and ideologies and linguistic power, maintaining that relationships among them are even more complex in post-

modern societies. Pavlenko and Blacklegde (2004) argue that language choice and attitudes cannot be separated from political arrangements, relations of power, language ideologies, and the interlocutors' views of their own on and others' identities' (see also Heller 1995). Pavlenko and Blacklegde (2004) argue that any analysis of language use needs to scrutinize how conventions of language of choice and use are created, maintained or changed, to see how language ideologies legitimize and validate certain practices, and to understand real-world consequences they have on people's lives. ELF in general, and BELF is not an exception to this, conceptualization of language and identity.

Looking at the above view, it is surprising that Hüllen's (1992) distinction between 'language for communication' and 'language for identification' is one that is sometimes invoked in discussions of ELF (cf. House, 2003). According to Hüllen (1992), English used for the purposes of international business, politics and science is a 'language for communication' (see also Koester, 2010). That is, it is an instrument for achieving transactional objectives, and not for expressing the different emotional and relational communicative functions expressed through mother tongues. House (2003) formulates this view as follows:

In using ELF, speakers are unlikely to conceive of it as a 'language for identification': it is local languages, and particularly an individual's L1(s), which are likely to be the main determinants of identity, which means holding a stake in the collective linguistic-cultural capital that defines the L1 group and its members (House, 2003: 560).

This suggests that House maintains that ELF is a language for communication rather than a language for identification. This also indicates that ELF users use it for utilitarian purposes with a pragmatic attitude (see section [3.3.5](#) above). She argues that ELF users do not normally develop a cultural attachment to the language nor try to signify their identities through English. Therefore, she also argues that concerns of identity or power are irrelevant in ELF.

Based on House's (2003) view, it seems logical to say that in international business in particular, where English is used for pragmatic reasons (Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* 2005), it is realized as just a communicative tool in a business toolkit (cf. Ehrenreich, 2010). English in business settings is seen as largely limited to being a language for communication and not for identification. However, empirical research in general ELF and in BELF makes it apparent that that participants in BELF encounters use English not only as a restricted utilitarian tool, but also to fulfil a range of relational

functions, such as building solidarity and common ground, and they manage to show identity while using BELF (cf. Pullin-Stark, 2009).

In a research study that does not address ELF use directly, Blommaert *et al.* (2005) present an argument that rejects the Hüllen's (1992) dichotomy. They adopt the idea, 'central to contemporary ethnography, that meaningful behaviour is organized indexically and that language is an ideological object, i.e., an object invested with social and cultural interests, not just a vehicle for (denotational, neutral) meaning' (p. 199). Canagarajah (2006) states that it is difficult to separate the functions of communication and identification in ELF. He argues that any language use, irrespective of the status of the speaker or objectives of use, can be related to identification and representation in relative degrees. He takes House's (2003) position discussed above and generalizes it to ELF researchers, saying that: 'We can understand the desire of scholars to define ELF as neutral and egalitarian' (p. 200).

Jenkins (2007) states that many L2 users no longer want to integrate into an NS English culture, but into what Dörnyei *et al.* (2006: 9) refer to as 'the world at large'. This, consequently, influences the extent to which L2 English speakers identify with the English language and its users, and the sense of how they see themselves and how they want to see themselves in English. Jenkins (2007) states that the type of identity changes required to be regarded as a NES, are both inappropriate and undesirable for ELF users who do not have the intention to reside in an English-speaking country, as is the case of the participants in this research. Jenkins' study, which covered a number of Asian countries, showed that English language teachers' attitudes towards NES as the ideal to which all speakers should aim are still mixed. However, Jenkins also explains that English teachers' identities in the Expanding Circle contexts are often in conflict or contradiction. There is an orientation towards NES norms as a desirable goal, mainly from a professional perspective, while at the same time many of her participants are also proud of L1 identities expressed through English and view themselves as 'going in between' or having 'negotiated identities' (ibid.: 230). This can be true for the CoP of English language teachers, which is under investigation in Jenkins' research because the proficiency in the English language is at the heart of the participants' professional identities. Jenkins' findings, however, echo

Meierkord's (2002) and Pölzl and Seidlhofer's (2006) views that speakers are able to choose to what extent they use language to signify certain identities, moving between the local and the international based on the situation and on their interlocutors. It will be interesting to see how identities are negotiated in business settings, where English is not directly related to the participants' professional identities. Jenkins (2007) believes that the features of successful ELF communication can lead ELF users to identify with each other in the CoPs in which users are joined in a shared endeavour with similar resources to draw on. This further substantiates my decision to adopt the CoP as a framework of analysis in my research, since practice can also be one more factor affecting identification with English in the workplace. In the next section, I discuss the participation of NESs in BELF interactions.

3.3.5.2 Native English speakers as BELF users

The presence of NESs may also pose a challenge to some BELF users. There are conflicting attitudes to NS English; however, NS English is generally described by other BELF users as difficult to understand. This is also in line with findings of general ELF research (see Jenkins *et al.*, 2011). Ehrenreich (2010: 422) reports that 75 per cent of her participants believe that NESs frequently use their native command of English 'as an instrument of power', a belief they find extremely irritating. This finding is also supported by Harzing and Pudelko (2012), who state that the designation of English as the corporate language can easily lead to power imbalances in MNCs in favour of its NESs. Ehrenreich's (2010) interviewees compared NESs with powerful players in the business context, such as customers and clients, or colleagues higher on the corporate hierarchy. Consequently, with NESs, special attention must be paid to the language used and the correctness of their English. Face is also an issue: asking for clarification is seen as a display of weakness (Charles, 2007); therefore clarification requests are not always an option. On the other hand, in non-competitive situations, NES interlocutors are usually seen as much less of a problem, but still difficult to understand (Sweeney and Hua, 2010).

When Kankaanranta and Planken's (2010) interviewees were asked about their perceptions of communication with NESs versus NNEs, they seemed to have a strong conception about the differences between the two situations, describing verbal interactions with NESs as 'unequal and

asymmetrical' and, as a result, more difficult than with NNEs. In addition, NESs are described 'as fairly inconsiderate interlocutors with apparently little accommodation skills' (ibid.; see also Du-Babcock and Babcock, 2007; Rogerson-Revell, 2008; Sweeney and Hua, 2010). Also, NESs are said to be difficult to understand mostly because of the speed with which they speak and because of their use of 'sophisticated vocabulary' (Rogerson-Revell, 2008: 341).

In contrast to the attitudes discussed above, some exceptions are found. One of Ehrenreich's (2010) interviewees stated that he did not experience any particular problems in interacting with NESs. However, considering his position as head of the division, his answer may be a diplomatic one to protect his image as board member or not to embarrass his NS subordinates and colleagues. Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) also encountered a participant, who is a NESs enthusiast and believes that without NES contacts, the English used by NNEs unavoidably narrows down and becomes a kind of slang, in which the same mistakes are repeated, and more fluently in each new event.

Although NS English(es) and some WE varieties (mainly Chinese and Indian) are considered or perceived by some speakers as harder to understand (Ehrenreich, 2010: 422; Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen 2010), intelligibility, in general, is not seen as an inherent quality of a certain variety of English, but more like something that is co-constructed by interlocutors who make an effort; making an effort is a quality that is seen in most NNEs' ELF talk (Ehrenreich, 2010: 422; see also Nelson, 2008). However, it seems that in the course of the mutual engagement with their international business partners, BELF users gradually get used to the varieties they have been most exposed to (Ehrenreich, 2010). Therefore, there is no clear overlap between the Englishes each individual identifies as easy or difficult to understand. Nevertheless, these two general trends are visible, i.e. NS English is generally considered more difficult or harder to understand, in addition to some varieties of WE, which seem to pose a major challenge.

3.4 Summary

This chapter started by presenting the merits of adopting the CoP model as a framework for sociolinguistic research, as well as ELF research. It then presented the phenomena of BELF, with reference to how the CoP model can be employed to study it. It then discussed the role of BELF and other languages in the workplace. Finally, it outlined some of BELF users' perceptions regarding BELF use in their workplaces, as well as those regarding the participation of NESs in BELF interactions.

Chapter 4 Interactional Pragmatics in BELF Communities of Practice

4.1 Introduction

As the research discussed in Chapter 3 shows, BELF users' discourse practices show the participants' essentially pragmatic approach to language matters. Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* (2005: 418), for instance, found that their interactants adopt 'a pragmatic and flexible approach to language use'. This pragmatic approach is seen in BELF users' strategic and skilful use of BELF along with other linguistic resources. ELF research reveals a number of different pragmatic properties are especially typical of ELF interactions. Numerous previous studies have found that ELF users tend to accommodate their linguistic behaviour to adapt to their interlocutors' communicative needs. ELF research also shows that ELF use is often culturally hybrid. Both speech accommodation and cultural hybridity are discussed in this chapter, with a discussion of ELF research on the existence/nonexistence of the 'let-it-pass' principle proposed by Firth (1996). ELF research also shows that ELF users employ various communicative strategies which help smooth ELF exchanges and ultimately achieve the communicative goals of an interaction. The use of these strategies in ELF has been described from numerous perspectives, including conversation analysis (CA) and pragmatics and in various contexts (Kalocsai, 2014).

This chapter starts with introducing the debates regarding ELF pragmatics, giving a general overview of how ELF, as a research paradigm, takes a different approach to the linguacultural diversity present in ELF contexts. The chapter then discusses the two pragmatic properties of ELF frequently reported and contested in ELF research (speech accommodation and ELF cultural hybridity) considering findings from both general ELF and BELF research. I follow the discussion with overviews of different accounts of ELF communicative strategies from sociolinguistic and pragmatic viewpoints, and from the more specific perspective of BELF/ELF research. I discuss previous ELF research on these strategies under two subheadings. Firstly, I discuss same-speaker strategies, encompassing some of the strategies the first/main speaker employs to explicate their message, such as paraphrasing, intonation and hedging. Secondly, I present some other-speaker strategies as reported in ELF research, such as backchannels and utterance completions. I then look closely at the use of code-switching since it is one of the most well-documented communicative strategies in ELF interactions. In the discussion of code-switching, I

present the most prominent sociolinguistic models that account for the use of code-switching in multilingual communities (e.g. Gumperz 1982) and then discuss findings from ELF research on code-switching. Finally, in light of the discussion of ELF interactional pragmatics, I present ELF researchers' reconceptualization of the concept of competence with discussion of Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's (2011) model of Global Communicative Competence (GCC) in BELF.

4.2 Research on English as a lingua franca pragmatics

In BELF research, Poncini's (2002, 2007) and Louhiala-Salminen's (2002) contextual analyses of business people's discourse practices show the participants' essentially pragmatic approach to language matters as well as their strategic and skilful use of BELF along with other L1s. These findings clearly concur with work done in general ELF research. Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* (2005) state that their interactants adopted 'a pragmatic and flexible approach to language use'. This means that 'pragmatic reality decides language choice on a day to day basis, and effectiveness and efficiency in communication govern language use rather than linguistic correctness as such' (ibid.: 418).

It is worth mentioning here that most early BELF research comes from a business communication background (e.g. research done by Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen and Planken). Therefore, in early BELF research, there is a general lack of appreciation of the multilingual and multicultural richness found in BELF interactions. Adjectives such as 'simplified', 'clear' and 'basic' are often used in their description of English as used in BELF communication. However, like other general ELF researchers, I adopt the pluricentric approach to English in BELF interactions that appreciates the richness of the multilingual resources available to ELF speakers.

As mentioned repeatedly in the previous two chapters, findings from ELF research suggest that ELF speakers' main consideration is functional effectiveness rather than formal correctness (cf. Ehrenreich, 2009; Hülmbauer, 2009). This functional aspect of ELF use is more evident in the case of BELF, where effectiveness is key to success in business communications, as explained in Chapter 3. While formal correctness is not seen as a prerequisite for successful communication in

ELF, mutual intelligibility is considered as fundamental for the success of ELF interactions. Analyses of ELF spoken data show that proficient ELF users are able to use various resources aptly to transcend the challenges imposed by the diversity of their contexts to reach mutual intelligibility and achieve their communicative goals. It can be argued that participants are likely to be aware of these challenges and, therefore, participants tend to utilize the resources available at their disposal, linguistic or otherwise, in order to achieve successful communicative outcomes (cf. Kaur 2011; Mauranen 2006). Researchers investigating ELF in fact typically find few instances of misunderstandings in their data, and in these few instances meaning is usually locally negotiated and mutual intelligibility is achieved (cf. Cogo and Dewey 2012; Mauranen 2006; Pitzl 2005). ELF researchers, as a result, contest the normative views of fields such as Intercultural Pragmatics and SLA in which instances of misunderstanding are said to be commonplace and are linked to the lack of lingua cultural commonalities among the participants (cf. Gumperz and Tannen, 1979; Gass and Varonis, 1991). Gass and Varonis (1991: 122) for example, state that ‘when interlocutors do not share the same native language or the same sociocultural rules of discourse, the possibility for miscommunication is profound’. As explained in Chapter 2 on intercultural communication, ELF research contests the tenacious deficit view of ELF contexts in which plurality is seen as an impediment to communication, and any deviation from ENL is described in terms of errors and “incompetence” (Seidlhofer, 2004). ELF researchers, instead, take a difference perspective, acknowledging plurality as a strategic resource (cf. Hülbauer, 2009). Seidlhofer (2011: 99) argues that ‘ELF users can be observed – usually quite self-unconsciously – pushing the frontiers of Standard English when the occasion, or the need, arises’. This ‘pushing’ can be performed for various reasons and in various ways. This phenomenon has led ELF researchers to empirically argue about how, in spite of the linguacultural diversity, ELF interactions seem to be smooth and successful. Research reveals some pragmatic properties that appear to be characteristic of ELF interactions. These properties include accommodation and cultural hybridity, both of which are specifically considered in the next sections.

4.2.1 Speech accommodation in BELF

Jenkins (2011) explains that one of the ways in which ELF users achieve communicative effectiveness is through making extensive use of accommodation strategies, both for affective reasons and also to ensure comprehensibility. The use of speech accommodation is a common

feature reported in both ELF and BELF research (cf. Rogerson-Revell, 2010; Seidlhofer *et al.*, 2006). Accommodation theory (Giles and Coupland, 1991) asserts that speakers seek their listeners' approval, so speakers modify their speech in the direction of the listener's code in order to get this approval. It also explores the many reasons why speakers choose to emphasize (diverge) or minimize (converge) the linguacultural differences between themselves and their interlocutors through verbal communication. The main accommodation strategy used in ELF encounters is convergence (Koester, 2006; Rogerson-Revell, 2010), which involves adapting to an interlocutor's behaviour in terms of speech, gesture or posture (Giles and Coupland, 1991). In ELF interactions, this may imply converging in terms of pronunciation, repetitions, paraphrasing, code-switching and monitoring one's English (Cogo and Dewey, 2006; Cogo, 2009; Haegeman, 2002; Pitzl, 2005). When converging, interlocutors accommodate their level of English and may purposefully use 'non-standard' pronunciation or grammar. This indicates that forms which are normally judged as errors in learning contexts are actually employed in a strategic way to facilitate communication in business contexts. ELF research has recorded numerous examples of such convergences (cf. Cogo, 2009; Hülmbauer, 2009).

In a research that predates BELF, Connor (1999) demonstrates accommodative moves in the correspondence of a Finnish broker in the import-export industry. Although the broker's level of proficiency in English is considered high, he accommodated his language when dealing with less proficient business partners by using shorter sentences and notable 'non-standard' grammar. Haegeman (2002: 137) notes the regular use of 'downward accommodation', which, in line with SLA accounts of L2 English, she calls 'foreigner talk', in a small-scale corpus of BELF telephone conversations involving highly proficient Dutch speakers and less proficient international business counterparts. The 'foreigner talk' used by the more proficient speakers included article and pronoun deletion, amplification, explanation of lexical items, substitution of a lexical item by a simpler one and use of semantically flexible verbs, such as 'do', 'have', 'make'. Some of the features described by Haegeman (*ibid.*) are noted as some of the emerging lexico-grammatical tendencies of ELF (Cogo and Dewey, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2004).

Accommodation has been emphasized as a specific feature of ELF communication in general, but it is not limited to interactions involving NNEs only. There is evidence that English NESs involved in international business encounters use convergence strategies as well. Their accommodative behaviour is expected to be limited as some strategies, such as code-switching, may not be accessible to them if they happen to be monolingual. Rogerson-Revell (2007a) conducted a survey with a European business organization and found that NS respondents asserted that they modify their language in international meetings with colleagues from Europe by avoiding jargon, idioms and metaphor and by paraphrasing (Rogerson-Revell 2007a). Her preliminary data analysis of the meetings appears to support these claims, as there is some evidence that NESs do indeed accommodate in this way (Rogerson-Revell, 2008).

ELF users tend to use different communicative strategies for the purpose of accommodation. Cogo (2009), for example, explores the use of code-switching and repetitions in ELF research in light of accommodation theory, as will be explained in section [4.6](#) later. Kaur (2009) studies paraphrasing as an accommodative communicative strategy. Seidlhofer (2009a) states that two imperatives are central in ELF pragmatic understanding: the cooperative imperative and territorial imperative. The first one describes ELF users as accommodating each other in order to enhance understanding (i.e. converging) as explained above, and the second one, territorial imperative, concerns ELF users highlighting differences in order to retain their distinct linguacultural identity or to create group membership with other speakers (i.e. diverging). Seidlhofer (ibid.) asserts that the two imperatives are not mutually exclusive; ELF speakers have to balance the two imperatives depending on their communicative objectives. As seen above, the overwhelming majority of ELF research has been pointing towards Seidlhofer's cooperative imperative of ELF communication (e.g. Kaur, 2009; Cogo and Dewey, 2012). In the next section, I present an ELF's debate which concerns the use of repair strategies in ELF talk.

4.2.1.1 Repair or 'Let it pass'?

In direct relation to the discussion of accommodation is what Firth (1996) coined as the 'let it pass' principle. Firth observed that in telephone conversations of Danish export managers with their international clients, interlocutors did frequently 'let pass' items that would possibly cause

misunderstanding. Moreover, mutual understanding was assumed, unless the opposite was explicitly demonstrated. Firth (1996: 245) contends that this strategy is part of a joint effort in lingua franca interactions of 'making it normal'. It indicates that the hearer is actively, but implicitly, attempting to make sense of what is done and said, and generally repair is avoided and linguistic anomalies are ignored.

Rogerson-Revell's (2008; 2010) findings are very similar to those of Firth (1996) in terms of lack of repair. However, her study was conducted in the meetings of a European organization, in which the NSs of English were also participants. A discursive analysis of the meetings revealed that they 'appear generally meaningful, orderly and harmonious' and repair was nonexistent (Rogerson-Revell, 2008: 349). This was in spite of the fact that, in a survey conducted earlier, Rogerson-Revell (2007a) found that some of the NNES participants had confessed to facing a number of difficulties in communicating in such meetings, including expressing an opinion or interrupting appropriately. Rogerson-Revell (2010) suggests that the reason for this discrepancy might be the formality of such meetings, which are characterized by a generally smooth, orderly structure, and which do not allow enough opportunity for spontaneous turn-taking. Rogerson-Revell's (2008; 2010) studies show that triangulation of survey questionnaires and exploratory discourse analysis can be valuable in discovering potential discrepancies between what appears to be an unproblematic interaction and the speakers' perceptions of that interaction. These findings concur with those of House (1999; 2002), who recommends exercising caution in analysing ELF data. This is because an appearance of normality may be hiding problems at a deeper level (House, 2002: 265). In an international student meeting, House (1999) observes that while there was very little repair, her interactants could not manage turn-taking efficiently, and did not appear to be interactionally aligned with one another. She concludes that these ELF users lacked 'pragmatic fluency' in English, a concept which is briefly discussed in section [4.5](#) below on ELF competence.

Obviously, some ELF and BELF studies contest the notion of 'let it pass' and the lack of repair procedures in ELF interactions. Cogo and Dewey (2006), for example, question the view that ELF encounters are characterized by a tendency to 'let it pass'. They argue that negotiation of meaning is recurrent in the data they analysed (ibid.). However, their data consists of social rather

than business interactions. Pitzl (2005) shows how non-understandings are signalled, negotiated and then resolved in BELF meetings. She concludes that participants in the business meetings she studied show a 'high degree of cooperation' (ibid.: 60). This co-operation, however, manifests itself differently as Pitzl presents a good deal of evidence showing how her participants attend very explicitly to meaning and the language forms used to express it. Pitzl (ibid.) observes that repair of non-understanding is mainly done in a non-interruptive manner, using the fewest queries possible rather than explicit metalinguistic procedures. Firth (1996) and Rogerson-Revell (2008) found that BELF users in their research rarely deal directly with communication difficulties, and Firth (2009) found that they do not often display their 'foreign' language speaker status; however, these events do occasionally happen. Rogerson-Revell (2007b) suggests that such cases are handled by humour and code-switching. Firth (1996) argues that, as part of 'making it normal', ELF speakers make use of the production of frequent upshots or formulations of the speaker's utterances, which may be considered as marked or opaque. This finding appears to be in line with Kaur's (2009) finding in non-business ELF interactions that participants pre-empted misunderstandings through paraphrase and repetition, which can be considered accommodation strategies rather than 'let-it-pass' strategies as Firth (1996) claims.

One study that acknowledges the occurrence of repair in BELF as reported by their participants is by Kankaanranta and Planken (2010). According to their participants, 'grammatical inaccuracies' or 'non-standard forms' in BELF are commonplace, but generally of limited consequence. In oral communication, these 'inaccuracies' were typically ignored or 'passed over' (ibid.: 393). In those rare cases where grammatical inaccuracies interfere with exchanging information or result in misunderstanding, they usually lead to 'a sequence of negotiated meaning until the misunderstanding had been clarified' (ibid.). In written communication, 'grammatical inaccuracies' are not as easy to resolve *in situ*, but some measures such as checking comprehension of information in official documentation through follow-up emails or phone calls are still reported. It is worth mentioning here that Cogo and Dewey (2012), drawing on a corpus of 200,000+, words, failed to identify a single case where non-standard grammar led to miscommunication.

Although the research discussed above shows somewhat contradictory findings in regard to the occurrence or non-occurrence of repair in BELF interactions, there is general agreement that the participants' lingua franca status, which involves varying degrees of linguistic proficiency and using 'non-standard' forms, is not in any way considered a barrier to generally smooth and eventually successful communication in business settings. It can be concluded that findings in regards to the occurrence of repair and negotiation of meaning are highly sensitive to the nature and the context of the data examined. Moreover, variables, including genre and formality, in addition to the participants' varying linguistic proficiencies, will surely influence the findings. Therefore, more research covering different contexts and participants is needed.

4.2.2 ELF/BELF as a hybrid of discourse practices

ELF is often described as a hybrid of discourse practices. Jenkins (2011) asserts that ELF users use English in a fluid and flexible way by responding adeptly to the requirements of different communicative events. This fluidity and flexibility is the reason why ELF cannot be codified or described as a variety or a group of varieties, and it is this reality that has attracted criticism to the conceptualization of ELF from ELF opponents (cf. Saraceni, 2008). In ELF research, the 'fluidity' (Jenkins, 2011: 930) and 'heightened variability' of ELF discourse (Dewey, 2009: 60) are acknowledged, but from a positive angle. This fluidity is seen as a resource which allows room for extensive negotiation of meaning in which all available linguistic resources are utilized. It entails that shared knowledge cannot be taken for granted but needs to be co-developed, co-constructed, negotiated and explicitly referred to in different interactions (Cogo, 2010). Members in ELF CoPs negotiate their own hybrid linguistic resources for each interaction and with different interlocutors, creating what House (2003: 148) refers to as an 'intersociety', or what Pözl (2005: 112) calls an imagined 'third space'. This is a temporary space where participants negotiate new forms and ways of talking for their current interaction purposes. This conceptualization of ELF further substantiates my decision to use the CoP model because it entails that all linguistic forms are constantly negotiated before being accepted as part of the CoP's emerging shared repertoire (Cogo, 2010).

Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* (2005: 404) define BELF as a 'neutral' communication code, but this does not mean that BELF is cultureless. In fact, they stress that seeing lingua francas as 'cultureless' ignores the fact that ELF speakers of course have cultural backgrounds (*ibid.*). They cite Meierkord (2002), who describes general ELF interactions with applicability to BELF interactions and, in doing so, emphasizes diversity. Meierkord (*ibid.*) suggests that a lingua franca conversation is a hybrid (a linguistic masala) where, in addition to the speaker's proficiency in English, other aspects like the speakers' cultural backgrounds are in operation. Meierkord contends that what is often overlooked is that the users of a lingua franca do have a diversity of cultural backgrounds, and this diversity is reflected in their use of the language. Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* (2005: 404) further mention that speakers of BELF bring not only their 'culture bound views' into communication, but also 'discourse practices stemming from their respective mother tongues'. Like ELF, BELF discourse includes a hybrid of features that partly originate from one of the speaker's own mother tongues and partly from those of other BELF speakers' mother tongues. Research has also found that speakers will draw on L1, L2 and on other languages in their repertoires – even in some cases where no mother tongue speakers may be present (cf. Cogo and Dewey, 2012). Seidlhofer (2004: 218) states that 'interference' from L1 interactional norms is very rare—a kind of suspension of expectations regarding norms seems to be in operation', when speakers coming from different linguacultural backgrounds interact using ELF, there is a strong potential for cultural hybridity, as they tend to infuse 'elements from the local culture while preserving other features of the established rhetoric' (Canagarajah, 2006: 209). This infusion, what Pennycook (2007: 6) calls 'transcultural flows', define the processes that take place when diverse cultures meet via English as a lingua franca (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of intercultural communication in ELF).

This cultural hybridity or variability, according to Firth (2009), extends the traditional understanding of variation derived from a shared core of grammar or language norms. That is, he sees that variation is at the heart of this system, 'not secondary to a more primary common system of uniform norms' (p. 163). Firth also asserts that ELF is inherently hybrid in nature, for example, in that participants may borrow, use and reuse each other's language forms, create nonce words, and switch and mix languages. This happens especially when participants are

unable to rely on a 'preconstituted form' for a meaning. In short, participants operate complex pragmatic strategies to help them negotiate their variable form (ibid.).

Some of the features that are associated with BELF hybridity are generally related to aspects such as the proportion of business talk versus relational talk, directness versus indirectness, explicit versus implicit talk, politeness and other face-related issues. Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* (2005), Louhiala-Salminen and Charles (2006) and Kankaanranta (2006) explain how the features normally identified as 'typical' of Finnish and Swedish communication by their survey respondents are much more complex in meetings and email communication. The 'talkative' Swedes generate talk by asking questions and giving opinions, addressing their interlocutors directly, and using metadiscourse to refer to what was said earlier, whereas the 'few-worded, direct' Finns focus on the information at hand, using fewer metadiscursive practices in their talk (see also Mauranen, 1993). However, in spite of those respondents' perceptions, Kankaanranta (2006) found that the amount of talk by Swedish and Finnish speakers is actually the same. In email communication, both groups displayed interpersonal orientation, although Finnish requests were somewhat more direct than those of their Swedish counterparts. These types of differences that seem to originate from L1 discourse practices are interesting from the BELF standpoint, as they may impact the intended message, and consequently the success of the interaction. This discussion of BELF communication involving Finns and Swedes suggests that culture-based discursive practices can be identified and alluded to in BELF talk.

In Kankaanranta and Planken (2010: 396), the majority of the Dutch and Finnish interviewees described themselves as 'issue-oriented and direct, and reported generally using fewer politeness formulas than BELF speakers with other mother tongues than Dutch and Finnish'. However, it is important to mention that their participants' ideas of what constitutes politeness and polite language varied considerably. Interestingly, some of Kankaanranta and Planken's (ibid.) interviewees gave evidence of changes in their BELF discursive practices. For example, the interviewees reported accommodating in the discourse styles. In other words, the interviewees stated that they gradually adopted features from their regular interlocutors that were evaluated as having a positive influence on communication. These features were referred to as 'social, non

business or relational' communication, or just 'small talk' and 'politeness' (ibid.: 396). Similarly, Planken (2005: 385) reports that most of her interviewees were aware that there are cultural differences in what is seen as sociopragmatically appropriate or polite, but they also acknowledged at the same time that such differences, although prevalent in international encounters, rarely posed a problem or got in the way of business communication, at least in their past experiences. However, according to Spencer-Oatey (2000), using these relational, 'rapport-building' features is considered more challenging than communicating business content, and as something that is generally not taught in business English courses. Participants can nonetheless still learn rapport-building discourse. Some of Kankaanranta and Planken's (2010) Finnish interviewees, particularly, described how they had recently noticed that such discourse had 'crept into' their own BELF and that of their Finnish colleagues. They even had a name for BELF discourse involving more relational talk: 'the international style' (p. 395). The rationale for this new type of hybrid discourse is summed up in a quote from one of the Finnish interviewees: 'You should just behave in a non-natural way and realize that it works!' (ibid.). Similarly, Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) explain how business professionals realize the importance of adopting a more relationally oriented discourse practice by resorting to recent developments in the business environment more generally. A finding that is also presented by one of Kankaanranta and Planken's (2010: 395) Dutch interviewees, is as follows: 'as networks are important, relationships are important, so it's more than doing business only'.

Having discussed the most important pragmatic properties of ELF/BELF, and considering the fluidity and cultural hybridity reported in the research, it is important to study the different communicative strategies ELF/BELF users employ in order to achieve mutual intelligibility. These strategies are the focus of the next section.

4.3 Communication strategies in ELF/BELF

As explained in section [4.2](#) above, ELF researchers attribute success in ELF interactions to ELF users' 'natural commonsense assumption that it is not easy to achieve [mutual understanding] without special effort' (Mauranen, 2006: 147). They 'expect comprehension to be hard to achieve in purely linguistic terms, and engage in various strategies to offset the problems that might

ensue' (Mauranen, 2007:245–6). These strategies can be defined in light of broader pragmatic research on communicative strategies (cf. Dörnyei and Scott, 1997). Canale and Swain (1980) define communicative strategies as part of their strategic competence, (see section [4.5](#) for further discussion) as 'verbal and nonverbal strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence' (p.30). Canale (1983: 11) presents communicative strategies in a broader sense by also including attempts to 'enhance the effectiveness of communication'. As Dörnyei and Scott (1997) explain, there are two defining criteria of communication strategies: problem-orientedness and consciousness. Consciousness entails basic senses of: attention, awareness and control. In ELF interactions, these strategies are employed for the same purposes defined in Canale (1983), i.e. to repair moments of non/misunderstanding, and to show consciousness and engagement.

Research on ELF pragmatics has explored the use of some of the strategies that are normally seen as a 'compensatory device' in mainstream SLA research (Dewey, 2009: 67) such as code-switching (Cogo, 2009; Klimpfinger, 2009), paraphrasing (Kaur, 2009) and repetitions (Cogo, 2009; Kaur, 2009). The findings of this research emphasize that ELF users exploit these for the purpose of co-construction of meaning rather than just to repair communication breakdowns. Because of the functional importance of the creative ways in which ELF users employ communicative strategies to co-construct meaning and achieve mutual intelligibility, ELF research has shifted focus from linguistic description of regularities to pragmatic concerns with the aim of finding out the underlying functions of the preferred forms and ways of communication in ELF CoPs (Dewey, 2009; Jenkins, 2011).

ELF research does not normally assign different strategies to the different roles interlocutors play in interaction (e.g. speaker/recipient roles). This is because some of these strategies are equally employed by the different participants in an interaction, and because there is so often a very fluid, overlapping shift between the two roles. Paraphrase and repetition, as examples, can serve the functions of both self-repair and other-repair. However, because my research is rooted in a business CoP, business-specific contextual factors need to be put into consideration. The recordings of the naturally occurring interactions in this research came from business meetings

where there are strict turn-taking rules and clearly defined power relationships, and therefore, for the purpose of clarity and organization, I discuss ELF pragmatic strategies under two main headings: same-speaker strategies and other-speaker strategies.

4.3.1 Same-speaker strategies

Research shows that speakers in an ELF interaction tend to employ certain strategies to explicate the content of their utterances to their interlocutors. In some cases, this happens even when the recipient does not show a signal of non-understanding. Kaur (2009), for instance, asserts that her participants took measures to pre-empt potential problems of understanding before the problems could occur (see also Mauranen, 2006, for similar findings). The absence of immediate verbal interlocutor feedback normally present in a speaker-recipient negotiation of meaning makes it clear that the purpose of employing supportive strategies is to pre-empt potentially problematic elements in an utterance. Mauranen (2006: 135) describes the interactional strategies that speakers employ to pre-empt problems of understanding as 'pro-active work'.

Some of the more commonplace pre-emptive/pro-active interactional supportive strategies in ELF interactions are code-switching, paraphrasing, repetitions and intonations. Self-repair, a term that refers to any self-modification of a prior utterance, as Mauranen (2006) explains, is a commonly used form of pro-active work in ELF situations. Self-repair can be perceived as an attempt on the speaker's part to make talk more intelligible, and Mauranen (*ibid.*: 139) believes that practices of self-repair 'are not often highly explicit in their attempts to secure comprehension', especially when there is no immediate feedback for the recipient. These practices nevertheless suggest the awareness of the first speaker of what is needed to make a prior utterance more comprehensible. Mauranen argues that self-repair strategies constitute a powerful self-regulating mechanism that allows the speaker not only to make linguistic and factual corrections but also to make talk more specific, explicit and clear. She argues that employing self-repair practices can in part explain the limitedness of the instances of non-understanding/misunderstanding in ELF interaction reported in the literature. Her argument, in a way, contests Firth's (1996, 2009) claim that ELF users tend to let pass problematic elements in their interlocutors' utterances (see section [4.2.2](#) above).

Additionally, Mauranen (2007, 2010, 2012) and Penz (2011) also suggest that the speaker's move to make discourse explicit constitutes an important strategy in ELF interactions. Specifically, Mauranen (2012) argues that speakers employ discourse reflexivity in order to boost the clarity and comprehensibility of their utterances. Discourse reflexivity, as defined by Mauranen (1993: 153), is the speaker's 'explicit commentary on his or her own' ongoing talk. Mauranen (2010) argues that ELF users, by using discourse reflexivity, explicate how they wish their interlocutors to understand their utterances, and how they interpret their interlocutors' utterances.

Paraphrasing is another same-speaker communicative strategy found to be extensively used by speakers in ELF (cf. Kaur 2009), both to negotiate understanding and to accommodate differences in ELF communicative events. Paraphrasing or rephrasing the form of a prior utterance, for instance, allows speakers to make their utterances clear and increases 'the chances that at least one of the formulations will get across to the hearers' (Mauranen, 2007: 248). Kaur (2009) finds that ELF users in her data make strategic use of paraphrasing to create redundancy and avoid potential communication breakdown, especially if an utterance has elements that suggest that shared understanding can be threatened. When there is a signal of a non-understanding, paraphrasing can also be used as a self-repair strategy as explained above. Some of these signals are prolonged silence at a transition-relevance place, silence after muted minimal responses from the recipient and following overlapping talk (Kaur, 2011). In this case, a paraphrase of a prior utterance can enhance the recipient's understanding and locally repair a moment of non-understanding. Kaur (2009) also found that repetition, as a communicative strategy, is used in a similar fashion to pre-empt potentially problematic segments of talk and as a repair strategy in moments of non-understanding (see also Kalocsi, 2009 and 2011).

Pickering (2009) focuses on the use of intonation, exploring its discursive role as a pragmatic strategy in ELF interactions. She studies intonational structure and how this structure creates informational and interpersonal convergence in ELF interactions. Pickering finds that tone choice and key choice can affect interactional success in ELF communication. Pitch cues in ELF interactions are used to signal the onset of a potentially critical point in the interaction and also the

accomplishment of repair sequences. This means that the use of intonation as a pragmatic resource in ELF interactions is distinctive, in that speakers in ELF interactions make tone and key choices basically to signal potentially problematic elements of an utterance and to indicate their repair sequences. The abovementioned strategies are found to contribute to better communicative clarity because of their strategic importance for the process of negotiation of meaning. They, along with code-switching discussed in section [4.3.1](#) below, encompass some of the ways in which ELF users manage to overcome the diversity present in the ELF interactional contexts.

Hedging is another communicative strategy, though it has less to do with negotiation of meaning than do the strategies discussed above. Hedges are expressions that convey the speaker's willingness to reduce his or her commitment to the propositional content of the utterance (Handford, 2010). In pragmatics, hedging is associated with uncertainty and tentativeness and can be used to reduce the speaker's commitment to the utterance and convey uncertainty, hesitation, or politeness (ibid.). Although hedging is an important subfield of politeness in pragmatics, it has not received considerable attention in ELF research. One exception is Mauranen (2004). Mauranen notes that hedges in ELF data perform two functions: they can either affect the propositional content of an utterance, i.e. information-oriented hedges, or underscore the interactive functions, such as politeness and saving face, i.e. discourse-oriented hedges. Mauranen maintains that the academic texts in the corpus she collected show that hedging is extensively used in academic ELF as a pragmatic strategy. However, Elder and Davies (2006) argue that if there is a greater preponderance of hedging in the ELFA corpus, it is interesting from an ESP viewpoint not from an ELF viewpoint, unless it could be demonstrated that hedging is more prevalent across all domains of ELF use than it is in 'Standard English'. To respond to Elder and Davies's point, I look closely at the use of hedging in BELF in order to form an understanding of how hedging is employed.

4.3.2 Other-speaker strategies

ELF research places emphasis on cooperation and co-constructing of understanding, indicating that even the recipient in a communicative event must be alert and active, rather than passive, in

order to achieve successful communication. In ELF research, recipients are found to engage with the first speakers in what Kalocsai (2009, 2011) calls 'collaborative utterance building' or what Cogo and Dewey (2012) call 'simultaneous talk'.

One of the forms that Cogo and Dewey (2012) discuss under the broad label of simultaneous talk is backchannels. 'Backchannels are short verbal responses that the listener makes without aiming to take over the turn' (McCarthy, 1998: 176). Thus, a 'speaker remains speaker' and a 'hearer remains hearer' (Schiffrin, 1987: 99). As a recipient-initiated strategy, backchannelling is of strategic importance to the smoothness of ELF interactions (cf. Cogo and Dewey, 2012). Generally, backchannels are used to show interest, to indicate understanding, to acknowledge what the other speaker is saying and to encourage the other speaker to continue (Kalocsai, 2009). Thus, backchannels 'indicate that a piece of talk by the speaker has been registered by the recipient of that talk' (Gardner, 2001: 13) and also 'help the current speaker along while manifesting the listener's attention' (Stenström, 1994: 81). Examining the use of 'yeah' as a backchannel in NNEs talk, for example, Wong (2000) argues that NNEs exploit the positive impact of backchannels to downtone face-threatening acts. He argues that backchannels in NNE talk may serve as a sign of 'self-presentational display' (ibid.: 60), suggesting that NNEs are generally more attentive to what they say.

In ELF research, Kordon (2006) and Cogo (2007) have studied the functions that backchannels play in ELF interactions. Kordon (2006: 65) describes the participants' laughter and agreement tokens as forms of backchannels that serve 'flow function', i.e. that contribute to the flow and the smoothness of an interaction. The other function Kordon (ibid.) describes is 'rapport function', which concerns the recipient's show of interest and involvement in creating a positive interactional atmosphere. Cogo and Dewey (2012) assert that backchannels often overlap or latch with the prior utterance, and therefore they can be seen as overlaps. Thus, Cogo and Dewey place most instances of backchannels within the broader label of simultaneous talk. They categorize three groups of overlaps that can be labelled as simultaneous talk practices. First, they identify 'backchanneling overlaps', where the speaker offers a backchannel in an overlapping speech; second, there are 'completion overlaps', where the recipient offers an overlapping completion to

the sentence of the current speaker; and third, there are 'misjudgement overlaps', where the recipient starts speaking in an overlapping turn, not because of their intention to take over the turn, but because they have misjudged the transition place. With respect to overlapping completions (where there is no indication of a word search), Tannen (1984) gives an elaborate description of the interactional process involved: The recipient picks up the first speaker's turn, and then offers a possible end of her utterance. The first speaker then accepts the item offered and incorporates the item into his original utterance. Tannen argues that it generally serves to make the conversation smooth and cooperative. In this case, like backchannels, utterance completions shows listenership, engagement and investment in the conversation.

Cogo and Dewey (2012) further examine the recipient cooperation in the form of offering a completion immediately after the prior turn, which they call 'utterance completions'. These completions are often offered in moments of 'word search'. The notion of word search is normally used in references to problematic talk, where the first speaker displays difficulty in finding a word or in the formulation of an utterance (Kurhila, 2006). The speaker may signal their difficulty by hesitating in finishing the utterance, or by producing longer than normal pauses, sound stretches, incomplete wording and/or repetitions (Cogo and Dewey, 2012; Kalocsai, 2009).

In moments of word search, according to Cogo and Dewey (2012: 151), utterance completion follows a standard format made of three sections: (a) 'the preliminary component': the first part of the utterance which has the main constituents before 'the transition relevance place', (b) 'the completion': the part pronounced by the interlocutor after the transition relevance place, and (c) 'the signal of coproduction' which consists of verbal or non-verbal markers inserted after the preliminary component which signals the need for the completion. Common signals of coproduction are repetitions, elongation of a sound, rising intonation, hesitation markers (e.g. pauses and fillers) and, as in some cases in my data, indicating being at a loss of words through culture-specific markers. While the signal of coproduction is the element which implies that the utterance needs completion, it is the function of the preliminary component to suggest how the utterance has to be completed (*ibid.*). Therefore, the preliminary component projects how the utterance is going to continue (Sacks, 1992; see also Cogo and Dewey, 2012).

Having looked at some of the communicative strategies reported in ELF research, the next section explores the use of code-switching as the most documented communicative strategy in ELF research.

4.4 Code-switching

As explained in section [4.2.3](#) above, ELF/BELF interactions can be characterized as a hybrid of discourse practices, in which speakers infuse elements from their different L1s and other codes available in their repertoires. One of the means by which this infusion is achieved is through the employment of code-switching as a communicative strategy. Sociolinguistics were interested in how multilingual communities organize and use their multilingual linguistic resources long before ELF researchers entered the sociolinguistic scene, and there has been a continuous debate around the different theories that account for actual language choice. Code-switching refers to the phenomenon of alternating between the use of two or more languages or language varieties (henceforth codes) in different domains or within one conversation (Myers-Scotton, 1993). Some researchers, however, strictly define it as an individual's use of two or more language varieties within the same conversation (e.g. Heller, 1988). Code-switching can occur between codes recognized as distinct languages (e.g. between English and Arabic), or between varieties, registers or styles of a single language (Woolard, 2004).

Obviously, ELF researchers are not concerned with an SLA approach to code-switching, as this approach analyses code-switching in terms of the speakers' linguistic proficiency as a compensatory strategy (e.g. Poulisse, 1987; Weinreich, 1953) and therefore as an indication of 'incompetence'. ELF researchers are equally disinterested in the formal linguistics approaches that aim to specify the linguistic factors which constrain such practice (e.g. Poplack, 1980; Clyne, 1987). Sociolinguists, in general, are more concerned with the social meaning of, motivations for and functions of code-switching. Sociolinguists view code-switching as the systematic, skilled and socially meaningful use of the multilingual resources available to a community's members

(Woolard, 2004). Some of these researchers have made great efforts to show how code-switching is resourcefully employed to create communicative effects. Their research has led to the current acceptance of code-switching as a strategy that enriches communicative potential, especially in CoPs where there is an established, yet constantly negotiable, shared repertoire of resources. In such communities, code-switching and other communicative strategies that an outsider may see as unpredictable variations become a 'communicative resource for members' (Gumperz, 1982: 69).

4.4.1 Sociolinguistic accounts of code-switching

A number of models have been proposed to account for the use of code-switching in multilingual communities. Almost all discussions of code-switching start with an overview of Gumperz's (1972, 1982, 1990, 2005) seminal and enduring work, in which he views code-switching as a skilful and resourceful communicative practice. He (along with Blom in 1972) suggested a distinction between situational and metaphorical code-switching that continues to shape research to date, including this research. Gumperz (1972, 1982, 1990, 2005) incorporated code-switching within his general theory of conversational inference. In this view, code-switching is just one resource interactants use to indicate how they define the communicative event they are in, and how they want their utterances to be interpreted. All interactants 'rely on indirect inferences that build on background assumptions about context, interactive goals, and interpersonal relations to derive frames in terms of which they can interpret what is going on' (Gumperz 1982: 2). Interactants who share similar backgrounds use 'contextualization cues' to signal and also infer different interactional frames, which allows them to interpret specific utterances. Code-switching is one of the many cues speakers rely on, in addition to prosody and other principal resources that Gumperz identifies.

Although Gumperz's situational/metaphorical distinction is considered quite dated, I find it the most suitable in accounting for the use of code-switching in my data, as is evidenced in Chapter 6. In situational switching, a change of code signals a change in the definition of the speech event, indicating 'clear changes in the participants' definition of each other's rights and obligation' (Blom and Gumperz 1972: 424). Through situational code-switching, interactants signal changes

in the goal, topic or setting of an interaction. Gumperz (1982: 60–1) later associated this well-established code-switching with Fishman's (1967) definition of diglossia in which codes are clearly compartmentalized. Some researchers describe Gumperz's situational code-switching as 'code selection' (e.g. Edwards, 1993) or 'language choice' (e.g. Pütz, 1997) rather than as code-switching, which is identified as less stable and less structured within the medium of communication (Woolard, 2004). Similarly, Goffman (1981: 128) proposed the concept of 'footing' to account for the 'changes in alignment [we] take up to ourselves and others'. Goffman (1981: 145) characterizes most code-switching instances as involving 'changing hats'. This means speakers have the ability to rapidly alter their active social role. This observation closely fits Gumperz's definitions of situational code-switching. This characterization of situational code-switching can serve as the basis to account for code choice in some of the business meetings in my data where the national background of some of the meeting participants can play a major role as a contextual factor, and therefore affects the code chosen in some business meetings.

Gumperz and Blom (1972) also argue that bilinguals switch codes not only when there is a change of domains, as in the case of situational code-switching, but also within the same speech exchange when the setting and the participants are exactly the same. Gumperz and Blom (1972) introduced the notion of metaphorical switching (which Gumperz (1982) later encompassed under the label of conversational code-switching) to distinguish it from situational code-switching. In this case, code-switching is considered not only as a response to some contextual factors, but also as a strategic use of available linguistic resources to construct meaning. This means that change in the code use does not signal a change in the definition of the speech event, and interlocutors do not adjust the rights and obligations already in operation, which seems more in line with ELF/BELF contexts, as is explained in section [4.4.2](#) below. Through conversational code-switching, interactants activate different relationships that they also hold (Blom and Gumperz, 1972). This activation or allusion is achieved through momentary use of a code which serves as a 'metaphor' for another relationship that is often linked to it. Blom and Gumperz (1972) refer to this allusion as a 'semantic effect' of metaphorical switching. It relies on and utilizes speakers' implicit awareness of associations of the different codes (Woolard, 2004). Responding to critics who questioned this clear-cut dichotomy of situational and conversational code-switching, Gumperz (1984) later characterized situational and conversational code-switching as two ends of a

continuum as opposed to two contrasting forms of code-switching. However, Gumperz research in general asserts that code-switching in established speech communities has established conventions and practices which cannot be applicable in ELF situations; this concept is discussed in section [4.4.2](#) below.

What most sociolinguists seem to agree on is that code-switching is a highly skilled communicative practice that can be socially meaningful and can lead to achieving different communicative goals. According to Gumperz (1982: 75-84), the possible social meanings of code-switching involve discourse functions such as highlighting quotations, specifying addressee(s) as the intended recipients of a message, reiteration and interjections, qualifying a message, and differentiating between what is personal and what is general. Romaine (2001) accepts Gumperz's list and adds more discourse functions to it. These additions include code-switching as sentence fillers, clarifying or emphasizing a point, shifting to a new topic, marking the type of discourse and specifying social arena. These discourse functions have served as the basis for analysis for social meaning of code-switching instances in ELF research (e.g. Klimpfinger, 2009), as is discussed later in section [4.2.2](#).

Along the same line, Myers-Scotton (1993) asserts that this list of social meanings can be useful in explaining why people switch codes, but she argues that it can never be exhaustive, as every day a new motivation can be added. Myers-Scotton proposes a theory aiming to explain code-switching as a universal rule-governed phenomenon. She states that different codes are symbolic of different social values. Making socially significant language choices and going against expectations, code-switchers as active agents, create social meanings such as solidarity or distance.

Some sociolinguists accept that code-switching can be interactionally meaningful and symbolic, but warn against the confidence that every code-switch instance can achieve its meaning as a metaphor of distinct social worlds. As Auer (1998: 105) puts it, 'there is a certain danger for the pendulum to swing too far i.e., to treat each and every instance of language alternation as

meaningful in the same “semantic way”. Although Auer asserts that Gumperz’s approach is interpretive and interactional, he argues that it is too macro-social, because it supposes that a contrast in social worlds is always significant to speakers and invoked in conversational code-switching. Following the method of conversation analysis (CA), Auer (1998) insists on the local production of meaning. He argues that code-switching is embedded within conversational practices and, like other conversational phenomena, it must be analysed on this level of production. That is, only when participants make structurally given social identities clearly relevant in the sequentially unfolding talk can they be considered significant to the analysis. According to Auer, code-switching should not be treated as a metaphor for social worlds, because it in itself can generate interactional and rhetorical effects, just as loudness and pitch may do. Auer (*ibid.*: 8) calls this type of code-switching ‘discourse-related code-switching’. In this sense, switching codes may signal change of topics, flag a side comment from the main topic, highlight a punchline or be used to report speech. These discourse functions can be indicated by a switch in codes without provoking associations to other social structures or relationships.

Other researchers who are sceptical of the strategic values of code-switching argue that there is some degree of ambiguity and indeterminacy in some instances of code-switching. The term ‘strategy’ used by Gumperz and his followers reflects the notion of skilled performance in code-switching, but it also implies fixedness, intentionality, and prior planning (Bailey, 2000). The conception that strategies pre-exist actual interactions is based on a conceptualization of code-switching that reifies functions of code-switching (*ibid.*). This perspective implicitly assumes ‘Western’ theories of intentionality and meaning that have been often criticized by linguistic anthropologists (e.g. Duranti, 1992; Stroud, 1992). Furthermore, the concept of intentionality implies speakers’ conscious control, as Stroud (*ibid.*) argues. However, Gumperz (1984) takes a clear stance regarding the concept of conscious intentions, stating that ‘metaphorical switching occurs demonstrably below the level of consciousness’. He asserts that ‘people are often not even aware of what they do’ (p. 110). Gumperz’s main focus is on interactional functions of code-switching which, he argues, should not be interchangeable with social motivations.

Stroud (1992) himself uses the term 'strategy' to analyse code-switching in Gapun and lists some functions that code-switching plays in his data. However, his cautious conceptualization of code-switching leads him to reject his own detailed analysis because, as he argues, he does not know if his participants draw the same conclusion that he does. He also, convincingly, argues that any 'one instance of code-switching could be performing one or a manifold of different functions simultaneously' (p. 145). He concludes that ambiguity remains the essence of the code-switching instances in his research context. Nonetheless, this ambiguity, as Woolard (2004) argues, is always characteristic of pragmatic strategies until they become thoroughly conventionalized, which, considering the fluidity and heightened variability of ELF interactions (as discussed in section [4.2.3](#) above), can never be achieved. Stroud (1998) suggests researchers should check their own interpretation against their participants' interpretation regarding what the participants were trying to achieve through their switches. Stroud (*ibid.*: 322) asserts that 'language use and patterns of code-switching both structure and are structured by indigenous cultural practices'. Therefore, researchers should consider cultural information unavailable within the discourse data, as if they ignore it their analyses would be lacking important elements of function and meaning. Stroud's argument is that 'conversational code-switching is so heavily implicated in social life that it cannot really be understood apart from an understanding of social phenomena' (*ibid.*). He finally suggests that discourse analysis should be grounded in an understanding of the society within which communication takes place. Nonetheless, Nlepp (2006) strongly asserts that it should not be assumed that all elements relevant to discourse and social interaction are visible to the researcher, especially when this researcher is not embedded in the specific social context he or she is studying. Nlepp refers to Stroud's (1998) conclusion that the ideal approach to understand code-switching should include ethnographic observation in addition to close analysis of discourse while providing an empirical warrant for any conceptualization of the discourse analysed.

Some researchers question the label code-switching itself as it is difficult to distinguish code-switching from other language contact phenomena. Woolard (2004: 103) for instance, raises the question of 'where to draw the line between code-switching and borrowing, interference, and/or emerging new contact varieties?' She also, rightly, argues that with the recent stress on the fluidity of different linguistic structures and of their social meanings, the concept of code-switching can be questioned as it treats codes as discrete entities (*ibid.*). Muysken (2000) argues that some

linguistic forms can be seen not as belonging to either one code or another, but as being part of more than one code. Some researchers adopt 'a monolectal view', which sees the phenomenon not as switching between two distinct codes, but as drawing upon a single code of mixed origins (e.g. Meeuwis and Blommaert, 1998). In response, Michael-Luna and Canagarajah (2008) suggest the term 'code meshing' to describe situations like the ones described by Muysken (2000) and Meeuwis and Blommaert (1998). Michael-Luna and Canagarajah (2008: 57) argue that, while code switching and code meshing share similarities, such as the strategic and rule governed use of two or more codes for specific rhetorical objectives, 'the core assertion of an integrated morphosyntactic system distinguishes code meshing'. The term 'switch', as Michael-Luna and Canagarajah (ibid.: 58) argue, suggests that there are two separate morphosyntactic sociolinguistic spaces that speakers move between as opposed to 'an active web of local discourses'.

Similarly, multilingual practices, including code-switching, can be seen in light of superdiversity. As Blommaert and Rampton (2016) explain, superdiversity is characterized by a great increase in the categories of migrants, 'not only in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language, and religion, but also in terms of motives, patterns and itineraries of migration, processes of insertion into the labour and housing markets of the host societies' (p. 21). Blommaert and Rampton argue that the predictability of the categories of 'migrants' and their sociocultural characteristics has disappeared. Sociolinguistics has taken up the concept of Superdiversity and presented a paradigm shift in the study of languages in multilingual contexts. Superdiversity, as an umbrella term referring to aspects of sociocultural and linguistic diversity, 'denaturalizes the idea that there are distinct languages, and that a proper language is bounded, pure and composed of structured sounds, grammar and vocabulary designed for referring to things' (Blommaert and Rampton 2016: 23). Superdiversity emphasizes fluidity, variability and complexity in today's globalized contexts (Cogo, 2012). Blommaert and Rampton explain that superdiversity involves indexicality, i.e. the connotational significance of signs and their associations, and multimodality, i.e. the fact that meaning is communicated in much more than language alone (e.g. gestures, postures, faces, movements, physical arrangements and the material environment in which utterances are produced). On this basis, proponents of applying superdiversity in sociolinguistic research in

multilingual contexts argue that ethnographic research is the best, and sometimes only, way to grasp the complexity of language use in such contexts.

In addition to code-switching and code meshing, the terms used in sociolinguistic research of multilingual practices in multilingual contexts include languaging (e.g. Creese and Blackledge, 2010), crossing (e.g. Rampton, 1995) and translanguaging (e.g. Garcia, 2009). These are practices performed by multilinguals accessing different linguistic resources and thus enhancing their communicative potential. These practices constitute phenomena that include code switching but go beyond it to include other multilingual practices (Cogo, 2012). Translanguaging, for instance, is defined as 'the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages' (Baker, 2011: 288). Proponents of using the term translanguaging, such as Michael-Luna and Canagarajah (2008), argue that code-switching as a term has associations with language separation while translanguaging celebrates flexibility in language use and 'the permeability of learning through two or more languages' (Wei, 2011: 1223). Wei argues that purposes of 'translanguaging transcend the combination of structures, the alternation between systems, the transmission of information and the representation of values, identities and relationships (ibid.). She explains that translanguaging is a transformative act because it makes a social space for the multilinguals 'by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, beliefs and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and make it into a lived experience' (ibid.). Translanguaging as described here clearly fits the multilingual practices in ELF/BELF settings and therefore it can serve as an umbrella term for the code-switching instances in my data as will be seen in Chapter 6.

Most of the proponents of applying the above concepts and terms seem to criticise using the term code-switching because the connotation of language separation. Like Michael-Luna and Canagarajah (2008), these proponents share the desire to describe multilingual practices in monolectal terms. This monolectal view can be applicable for many situations, but it cannot serve as a replacement for the concept of code-switching. This explains the enduring use of the concept in recent research, including ELF research. In many settings, even where boundaries are less

defined, the contrast between codes such as, Catalan and Spanish, as Woolard (2004: 105) argues, 'is psychologically real and ideologically meaningful to speakers, and remains a resource they can mobilize in interaction' (cf. Woolard, 1998 on code-switching in Catalonia). Woolard (2004) asserts that the more distinct the codes between which speakers switch, the more code-switching can be available for the speakers to use and for researchers to examine. Most ELF research tends to build on this dialectal view of code-switching and on the earlier traditions that treat code-switching practices as special phenomena which must be explained in their own terms as two or more alternating codes, as is demonstrated in the next section.

4.4.2 Code-switching in ELF research

In spite of the extensive criticism for their models of code-switching, Gumperz's (1982), Myers-Scotton (1993) and Auer's (1998) accounts still serve as main points of departure for most code-switching research, including in ELF settings. ELF researchers tend to view code-switching as a resource which speakers creatively exploit for a variety of communicative functions. However, to make up for the shortcomings of these models, some ELF researchers combine Auer's CA concepts of local production of meaning with Gumperz and Myers-Scotton's macro-social models (e.g. Cogo, 2007, 2009; Kalocsai, 2014; Klimpfinger, 2009). There have been some calls for a reconceptualization of multilingual practices in ELF contexts in a way that avoids separation, celebrates flexibility and adopts the recent developments in sociolinguistic research by using terms like superdiversity and translanguaging (see Hülmbauer, 2013 and Jenkins, 2015). These trends are seen in some of the recent ELF research such as Cogo (2012) who describes the instances of code-switching in her research in light of superdiversity and Wei (2016) who looks at multilingualism in Chinglish (Chinese English) in light of translanguaging as a concept and a term. In this research, I adopt the views offered in sociolinguistic research on translanguaging as a concept, and use the viable term code-switching to describe the actual instances of multilingual practices in my data.

Cogo (2009) sees code-switching in ELF in light of accommodation theory (see section [4.2.1](#) above). From an ELF perspective, this explanation of code-switching is especially important, as ELF communication is characterized as highly cooperative. Cogo (2009) presents code-switching

in ELF interactions as an accommodative strategy and argues that speakers skilfully switch codes to sound similar to their interlocutors and show solidarity and alignment. Similarly, Jenkins (2011: 930) asserts ELF users' extensions of 'the boundaries of language codifications' are meant to serve a multitude of communicative functions. ELF users, according to Jenkins, innovate in English, utilizing their multilingual resources to create their own forms of preference. Therefore, Jenkins (*ibid.*: 928) argues that, unlike the view adopted by the EFL paradigm, code-switching instances in ELF use do not signify 'gaps in knowledge'. ELF users, according to Jenkins (*ibid.*), switch and mix codes as a means of promoting solidarity with their interlocutors and projecting their cultural identities.

In addition to accommodation, Klimpfinger (2005, 2009) explains that ELF users switch codes for more or less the same discourse functions reported in the sociolinguistic research discussed above. She also explains how ELF users exploit code-switching to signal their cultural backgrounds. In her data, signalling culture through code-switching is done in two ways. First, there is emblematic switching, i.e. switching for exclamations, pause fillers or function words, to implicitly show a linguistic emblem of the culture. The second way to signal culture. According to Klimpfinger (2005), this signalling is accomplished through explicit code-switching, which refers to concepts that are associated with specific cultures, such as names and greetings. By contrast, House (2003) argues that in ELF interactions, speakers use ELF as a neutral instrument for communication and their L1s to index culture and identity. However, as Blommaert (2003) and Koester (2010) argue, this language for identification and language for communication binary is not always straightforward (see section [3.3.5.1](#) for a discussion of BELF speakers an identity).

There are some distinctive features in ELF contexts which need to be considered when accounting for instances of code-switching in ELF interactions. First, in ELF contexts, speakers naturally alternate not between two codes only, but between many, and there is no single code that is generally recognized as 'we' or 'they', which complicates the direct application of traditional accounts of code-switching (Cogo, 2007). Additionally, unlike the interactions described in most code-switching research, ELF interactions do not happen in stable communities; rather, they take place in ad hoc groupings of users who gradually 'establish a shared set of norms and rules for

the use of language' (Klimpfinger 2009: 349). Most importantly, Cogo (2009) argues that code-switching in ELF interactions is not flagged or signalled explicitly, except in some instances where it is used as a strategy to resolve moments of non/misunderstanding or when appealing for assistance. This is when ELF speakers show hesitations by taking long pauses or when they have a moment of word search or temporary memory lapse. Otherwise, ELF users tend to switch without drawing attention to the switch itself. According to Cogo (2007: 170), the absence of flagging indicates a certain 'normality' in the switch. Given this normality, Cogo (ibid.) further claims that code-switching is 'part-and-parcel of the participants' usual discourse practice'. The use of languages other than English is essential to ELF and regarded 'as a constituted and constitutive part of it' (Cogo, 2009: 264); it does not in any way threaten the success of ELF communication. On the contrary, in many cases the use of other languages can be seen to enhance it.

Considering the above description of fluidity and diversity of ELF interactions, the notion of competence in BELF communication is worth examining in order to see how communicative success is co-constructed by the interlocutors in a communicative event. This subject is the focus of the next section.

4.5 Competence in BELF communication

The statistics of native versus non-native users of business English indicate that the primary mode of communication of international business is BELF. What is traditionally referred to as NS 'competence' or 'proficiency' is neither expected nor necessarily beneficial. Nativeness is dismissed as 'unrealistic' and sometimes also described as 'unnecessary' from a practical, cost-benefit point of view (Charles, 2007: 262); some evidence also suggests that NS norms can even be a disadvantage (cf. Hülmbauer, 2009). Therefore, a discussion of what constitutes competence in BELF communication is necessary. What appears to be of great significance to ELF users generally is getting their meanings across (Kaur, 2009). Therefore, in ELF contexts, what counts as important is the accomplishment of communicative goals and, in this regard, the

skills and abilities that allow participants to achieve those goals constitute an integral part of their competence (ibid.: 236). This becomes even clearer in the situation of BELF, which can be considered 'an instrument for getting the job done in an international business environment' (Louhiala-Salminen *et al.*, 2005: 418).

In more general ELF research, there is a persistent call for a re-evaluation of some long-established linguistic concepts including 'competence' (cf. Cogo and Dewey, 2012; Kaur, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2011). As Kaur (2009: 14) argues, NNEs are often described as 'incompetent' users of the language – a perspective based on equating competence in a language with the speaker's knowledge of its standard grammar. This view is largely influenced by Chomsky's (1965) linguistic competence theory, which attributes competence to the mastery of an abstract system of rules based on an innate language apparatus. The theory also assumes 'an *ideal* speaker-listener in a completely *homogenous* speech community who knows its language *perfectly*' (Chomsky, 1965: 3, my italics). In spite of the popularity and longevity of the Chomskyan notion of competence, this sense of idealization and its validity have been convincingly criticized by sociolinguists since its introduction five decades ago.

According to this view, there is a well-defined competence for any language which is conceived as a complete and self-enclosed entity and which is known by its NSs in its entirety (Seidlhofer, 2011: 89). Chomsky strongly promotes the simple concept of 'a completely homogenous speech community' which, according to ELF research, does not exist in reality (cf. Cogo and Dewey, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2011). In SLA research, which is heavily influenced by the Chomskyan notion of competence, all measures of a learner's achievements are made in comparison with NS competence, but in reality there is no such competence, even if it is convenient to believe so (Seidlhofer, 2011: 89). In today's multilingual world and heterogeneous communities, where individuals have multiple linguistic resources, applying this Chomskyan notion of competence is absolutely untenable. As Seidlhofer (ibid.: 89) argues, in such communities, language knowledge clearly varies; people know their language more or less in different domains, and their competence will always be partial and incomplete.

As a reaction to Chomsky's linguistic competence, the notion of communicative competence was proposed by Hymes (1972). As a theoretical construct, communicative competence has been investigated in a variety of disciplines, for example, in linguistic philosophy, second/foreign language acquisition and communication studies. Communicative competence was presented by Hymes as a critical response to Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence. Hymes argues that the way language is used for communication has relevance beyond the language itself as a grammatical system. In other words, competence is dependent on the speaker's tacit knowledge and his or her ability to use it and thus, competence must also include non-cognitive factors, such as attitudes, values and motivation. Hymes' conceptualization emphasizes the inseparability of cognitive and affective factors and, thus, the social nature of competence. In Hymes' (ibid.) theory, the underlying, tacit knowledge of the rules available for communication is emphasized, and he indicated four aspects to define where this knowledge lies. These aspects are related to whether, and to what degree, the spoken or written text communicated is (1) formally (grammatically) possible; (2) feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available; (3) appropriate in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated; (4) done, actually performed, and what its doing entails.

Although communicative competence is considered a remarkable modification to the notion of linguistic competence, it has also been criticized by ELF researchers. Seidlhofer (2011) raises the question of how does one judge the relative possibility, feasibility, appropriateness and attestedness of a linguistic expression. She argues that clearly such judgments can be made only in reference to an established norm or other. Therefore, communicative competence is still implicitly based on the same idealization of language and community that Chomsky makes explicit. Like Seidlhofer (2011), Cogo and Dewey (2012) argue that a reconsideration of this long-established notion of communicative competence as it is currently applied in ELT research is needed. Looking at the dynamics of language in interactions and considering that English nowadays is less seen (at least by some researchers) as a stable set of clearly codified forms, the need to develop 'complex ideas' of how to describe language competence is greater.

In spite of Seidlhofer's (2011) criticism of Hymes' (1972) communicative competence, she does offer an extension to the concept that can make it valid and relevant in ELF research. She argues that it has been generally assumed, and, as implied by Hymes himself, that judgments of these four aspects of communicative competence have to be made by NS communities or with reference to them (Seidlhofer, 2011). However, what Seidlhofer offers in ELF contexts is an uncoupling of these aspects from the social NS communities and the relating of them to other kinds of communities, such as CoPs. As CoPs cut across the NS/NNS dichotomy, they can have different judgments about what is considered feasible, appropriate to context and performed, which emerges on site during an interaction itself. Seidlhofer (*ibid.*) argues that these aspects can, and need to, apply to ELF in general as they are related not to the definition of a fixed communicative competence, 'but to the ways language functions in the communication process itself'. Seidlhofer's treatment of Hymes' (1972) communicative competence is highly valid in a business CoP. It can be said that to succeed in global business communication, the four aspects of language communicative competence are highly significant and, in daily work situations, need to be repeatedly consulted. However, the judgments made are clearly not based on comparisons with NS use of the language, but rather on what is suitable in a given situation.

Hymes' (1972) communicative competence has also been investigated in communication research, in addition to the concept's origins in anthropology/ethnography and its subsequent application in the fields of linguistics and second/foreign language acquisition. In communication studies, the NS/NNS distinction is not at all discussed, and an approach that is similar to that suggested in Seidlhofer (2011) is adopted, i.e. the four aspects of competence should be applied in relation to the ways language functions in the communication process. Communicative competence in this field of inquiry is often described as effective and appropriate communication (cf. Canary and Cody, 2000; Spitzberg, 1988). As explained above, effectiveness and appropriateness indicate the of roles for different participants in a interaction; this indication applies not only to the speaker, but to all parties involved. However, just as in linguistics, the context of different communicative events is not strongly emphasized.

Hymes' (1972) theory was theoretically reduced by Canale and Swain (1980), who specifically applied it to foreign language teaching and acquisition⁴. Their popular adaptation of the theory distinguishes four areas of communicative competence. It acknowledges Hymes' grammatical and sociolinguistic competences, but the significance of their contribution lies in the introduction of what they call discourse competence (mastery of understanding and producing texts in the modes of speaking, listening, writing and reading, including textual cohesion and coherence) and strategic competence (the ability to employ compensatory strategies in case of difficulties in the three other competences; such as paraphrasing, clarification, slower speech, request for repetition and using fillers). As seen in section [4.3](#) above, findings from ELF research lend support to the notion of strategic competence, as these 'compensatory strategies' are very often alluded to when difficulties arise, as is discussed in the next paragraph. Moreover, Kim (1991) discusses the concept of 'intercultural communicative competence' as an extension to Hymes' notion of communicative competence. This competence has an additional level of 'metacompetence', comprising explicit awareness of the variant usages and the ability to adapt communicative strategies to different cultural situations. This conceptualization of communicative competence is highly relevant to ELF interactions, which are inherently intercultural and require high levels of intercultural awareness and sensitivity.

In an ELF-oriented investigation of competence, one of Kaur's (2009) important findings pertains to the interactionally constructed nature of competence. Her participants' ability to use various discursive practices skilfully and meaningfully to reach shared understanding, i.e. their interactional competence, contributes to the make-up of the participant's communicative competence. However, she convincingly argues that the participants' use of such strategies is contingent and situated in the social and interactional context of the unfolding conversation. The ability to use such practices in a second language or in a lingua franca can be brought about only through actual use of these strategies in the language concerned. Therefore, Kaur (*ibid.*) asserts that competence through which participants achieve shared understanding in ELF is co-created in the social and interactional context of the communicative event, as known strategies are used in new ways or new strategies are developed to tackle persistent problems.

⁴ See Lueng (2005) for a critique of the manner in which Hyme's communicative competence is narrowed in ELT research.

Naturally, ELF settings are often characterized by variable proficiencies, and this presents some challenges to the process of co-constructing shared understanding in ELF interactions. As Kaur (2009: 237) explains, participants are usually required to pay greater interactional effort to establish shared understanding, as evident in the extended negotiation sequences frequently found in her data. However, Kaur adds that in these sequences, what is also evidenced is the participants' combined use of various interactional strategies to facilitate the process of arriving at mutual understanding. Therefore, this seemingly less competent use of the language does not diminish the interactants' ability to utilize communicative strategies in the process of creating shared understanding, as has been explained throughout the discussion of BELF in this study.

Another account of competence in ELF research is found in House (1996, 1999, 2002, 2013). ELF users' utilization of linguistic resources is first described by House (1996, 1999) in terms of 'pragmatic fluency'; House (2002, 2013) later refers to this utilization instead as 'pragmatic competence'. House (2002) details the concept of pragmatic competence in ELF and sets up five performance criteria for pragmatic fluency. One criterion is the ability to 'carry weight' in substantive turns-at-talk and the four other criteria contain the notion of appropriateness: (1) the appropriate use of pragmatic phenomena such as gambits, discourse strategies and phase-specific speech-acts; (2) appropriate routines for initiating and changing topics; (3) an appropriate responding, turn-taking and turn-alignment behaviour; and, (4) an appropriate use of speech rate, pauses and repairs. Obviously, what is considered appropriate depends basically on the CoP and its members' evaluation of what is appropriate for their CoP's purposes (cf. Ehrenreich, 2009). Therefore, appropriacy in pragmatic terms cannot be predetermined. As Pölzl and Seidlhofer (2006: 172) argue, 'norms for pragmatic fluency are highly context-dependent and ought to be interpreted with closer attention to the attitudinal effects on interlocutors of the actual location of the interaction'. Pölzl and Seidlhofer (ibid.: 163) insist that what is appropriate 'in one ELF context might prove inappropriate in another'. Adopting a contextualised perspective, House's (1999: 85) idea of ELF users' 'lack of pragmatic fluency' is somewhat preconceived. In an attempt to re-conceptualize fluency in ELF interactions, Hüttner (2009: 274) presents the notion of 'co-fluency' or 'dialogic fluency', which is a collaborative construct where both speakers and listeners

collaborate to ensure understanding. Cogo (2010: 298) comments that from a dialogic- interactional perspective, 'all the elements listed by House are relevant when dialogically employed in appropriate contexts of use'.

From business professionals' perspective of what is perceived to be the required level of language competence, Ehrenreich (2010: 417) reports the operative 'pragmatic attitude' given by her participants. Kaur's (2009: 238) findings are in the same vein; and she asserts that from her participants' perspective, 'deficiencies' in language can be successfully overcome through the use of common communicative strategies such as those mentioned in Canale and Swain's (1980) strategic competence and discussed in section [4.5](#) above. Nonetheless, none of these research findings discusses the baseline of language competence required for ELF/BELF conversations to work efficiently, or to work at all. It seems clear that the participants, even if their use of ELF is different from NS English, are experienced ELF speakers with apparently high levels of proficiency. However, logically, there must be a low proficiency level at which communicating in BELF is not possible, since relying on the lingua franca basics from the English language is not possible.

Looking at the research findings, and considering that the concept of 'competence' itself is multifaceted, it does not seem logical to judge NNEs as 'incompetent' language users just because their command of the language differs from that of NESs. It can also be argued that, for the purpose of studying the current use of English as a lingua franca on the global scale, competence needs to be redefined, accounting for the findings and suggestions of ELF research, which is based on the actual language used in today's globalized and heterogeneous communities. In BELF research, a model that attempts to account for the different variables that constitute competence in BELF communication has been proposed by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011); that model is the focus of the next section.

4.5.1.1 Global Communicative Competence model

In a BELF-specific approach to competence, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011; see also Kankaanranta *et al.*, 2015) present a model to account for BELF competence in MNCs. This model is the Global Communicative Competence (GCC). Their findings indicate that the GCC consists of three layers: multicultural competence, competence in ELF, and the communicator's business know-how.

First, according to Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011), for global communication to succeed, a business person needs to have suitable sociolinguistic and discourse competence for the intercultural setting. This refers to the speaker's 'sensitivity towards different ways of doing things' (p. 248). It also includes some skills such as listening skills, accommodation skills, and understanding different varieties of a language. Multicultural competence comes from 'the realization of issues related to local, corporate or professional cultural practices as the basis of any communicative event, and 'enables the flexibility needed for GCC to succeed' (ibid.). They also assert that competence, to any extent, in more than one language increases this multicultural competence and increases the communicator's intercultural awareness. Second, competence in ELF is considered a crucial element in GCC. Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta recognize that competence in ELF seems to be different from the long-established notion of 'competence'. The users of BELF 'in a particular situation are capable of making use of the situation-specific core of the English language' (ibid.). Meanwhile, the users employ 'highly specialized, shared terms, and concepts to adapt to the forms and norms of the language required in each business situation' (ibid.) based on the shared repertoire of their CoP. Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta assert that competence in BELF communication includes the elements of strategic competence and pragmatic awareness, which necessitate being aware of the need to explicate messages using different discursive practices and interactional strategies. Successful BELF users, according to Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta, and in line with ELF research findings, paraphrase, ask questions, repeat utterances and use more than one channel to arrive at shared understanding. Third, and unique to BELF CoPs, the outermost layer of business know-how is essential for GCC. Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta have positioned it as the overall surface of the model, reflecting the fact that it cannot be separated from communicative competence, as it is an integral part of it.

The importance of the GCC model comes from the fact that it highlights the need for a multidisciplinary approach. This is essential to understand the requirements of communicative competence for modern-day business professionals working in global contexts. To reach this understanding, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) draw from communication research with its emphasis on the notions of appropriateness and effectiveness, and also consider ELF research, which enables the focus on the actual language used in the communicative event in question. Another point of strength in the model is that it acknowledges that communicative competence cannot be separated from field-specific professional competence, referred to in their study as 'business know-how'. Since this study is linguistic in nature but rooted in the business context, a multidisciplinary approach such as the GCC model offered by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta seems to be highly relevant. Although the model is not as groundbreaking and innovative as its developers believe, I find it useful as a framework to study competence in BELF. As one of my research questions aims to examine the management of intercultural communication through BELF, various elements from the GCC model must be drawn on in the discussion of BELF use in my research context.

4.6 Summary

In this chapter, I attempted to provide a comprehensive account of ELF/BELF pragmatics as reported in previous research. I started by presenting the debates regarding ELF pragmatics while discussing the three pragmatic features characteristic of ELF interactions. These are: speech accommodation, the 'let-it-pass' principle and ELF cultural hybridity. I then moved to give overviews of different accounts of ELF communicative strategies from sociolinguistic and pragmatic viewpoints and from BELF/ELF-specific perspectives. I then discussed previous ELF research on these strategies under two subheadings: same-speaker strategies and other-speaker strategies. The chapter then moved on to discuss the use of code-switching as the most well-documented communicative strategy in ELF interactions, starting from the sociolinguistic models that account for the use of code-switching in multilingual communities (e.g. Gumperz 1982) and ending with findings from ELF research on code-switching. Finally, in light of the discussion of

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ELF interactional pragmatics, this chapter ended with a discussion of ELF researchers' reconceptualization of the concept of competence with discussion of Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's (2011) model of Global Communicative Competence (GCC) in BELF.

Chapter 5 Research Design and Methodology

5.1 Introduction

As explained in the preceding chapters, the present study investigates business English as a lingua franca (BELF) in Deema Arabia, a Saudi MNC. Clearly, this is a wide and multi-layered field of research, which opens up many potential research questions and concomitant methodologies. Most ELF studies so far have concentrated either on attitudes toward ELF or on actual ELF use, and little research has focused on the two areas within the same CoP (for notable exceptions, see e.g. Cogo, 2012; Ehrenreich, 2009).

My study attempts to answer ELF scholars' call for 'clearly situated qualitative studies with a strong ethnographic element' (Seidlhofer *et al.*, 2006: 21) by studying both the use of BELF and the attitudes of BELF users in an ethnographic account. My data collection was guided by general principles of qualitative research. It was designed with a view to adopting an ethnographically oriented, multi-method approach. By adopting such an approach, I aim to capture the multidimensional realities of my research area as comprehensively as possible. More specifically, as noted in Chapter 3, I draw on the CoP framework (Wenger, 1998), which relies specifically on ethnographic techniques (cf. Ehrenreich, 2009; Smit, 2010). Thus, in the present study, the CoP model is used as a framework to design the data collection and analysis. Such an approach has a major implication; that is, the emphasis of data analysis is not only on the BELF participants' language use, but also on their sociocultural practices expressed through their use of BELF. By adopting an ethnographic perspective grounded in a CoP framework, I aim to uncover the practices that are crucial to the participants' everyday intercultural communication in BELF.

In this chapter, I first re-state my research questions. I then explain the guiding assumptions followed during my data collection and analysis. Next, I sketch out a description of the sociolinguistic reality of my research site, which is an MNC in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. I then discuss ethnography as a research paradigm with emphasis on the methodological significance of adopting an ethnographic perspective in my research. This is followed by a detailed account of

the ethnographic methods I employed to collect my research data. Finally, I discuss the analytical procedures I employed in my data analysis: discourse analysis and thematic analysis.

5.2 Research questions

I present this section here as a reminder of my research questions, which are:

1. What functional roles and status do Arabic, English and other languages have in Deema Arabia as a Saudi MNC?
2. What are the salient features of BELF communication in Deema Arabia as a Saudi MNC?
3. How is intercultural communication in BELF perceived in Deema Arabia as a Saudi MNC?

5.3 Research site and context

I conducted my fieldwork in Deema Arabia⁵, a company that provides cooperative insurance to businesses and individuals across Saudi Arabia. Deema Arabia for Cooperative Insurance is a Saudi-owned and operated publicly traded company. It is associated with the Deema Group, a UK-based international healthcare organization with more than 60 years of experience in the field of health insurance. The Group provides healthcare solutions to more than 10 million members in over 190 countries.

Deema Arabia was established in 1997. Today, with more than 1.2 million customers, Deema Arabia is the largest health insurer in Saudi Arabia. It has more than 1800 employees across Saudi Arabia, of which 52% are Saudi. In spite of this Saudi majority, Deema Arabia uses English as its corporate language. Some of the reasons for this choice are external, and some are internal. The most important external factor is the company's clients, which comprise of other MNCs. These MNCs, with their multinational staff members, are in constant contact with Deema Arabia's staff members. Additionally, as a franchisee of an international franchiser, Deema Arabia

⁵ Most of the information in this section is basically taken from the company's website which I cannot add as a reference for the sake of anonymity.

has to feed quarterly comprehensive reports to the mother company in London. Preparing accurate reports is much easier if ongoing business routines are conducted in English in the first place. With respect to internal factors for using English as the corporate language, HR records show that at least 80% of the non-Saudi staff members are not Arabic speakers. Some of these non-Arabic speakers hold key positions in the company's top management, including three English NS board members appointed by the mother company.

When recruiting new employees, Deema Arabia does not accept results of standardized language tests or language course attendance certificates as proof of English proficiency. Instead, they send potential candidates to a famous international language school, Berlitz, to undertake a comprehensive language test comprised of both oral and written components. There is a minimum acceptable score, and some candidates, regardless of their expertise, are ruled out because they cannot achieve this score. Scores considerably higher than the minimum requirement are required for positions within the department of public relations, as well as other departments that require constant internal or external contact with non-Arabic speakers.

Interestingly, one of the perks that Deema Arabia offers its employees is English courses from Berlitz, the same language school that tests the job candidates. It is mainly offered as part of the company's employee development plans for those who only managed to achieve the minimum language score. They are not compulsory, but most employees choose to take at least a month of language training. This may be due to the fact that promotion is associated with better language skills. This signifies the important role that English, as a de facto corporate language, plays in the company.

Deema Arabia was not at the top of my list when I was considering potential research sites because I was more interested in companies working in petrochemicals where the use of English is guaranteed as a result of the greater level of internationalism and diversity in these companies. However, the cooperation and the interest its management showed in my research encouraged me to conduct my fieldwork there. Negotiating access to business organizations is

reported to be very difficult (cf. Bryman and Bell, 2011), and I could see this from the very limited number of replies (only four) I received to the approach letters that I customized and sent to 17 MNCs in Jeddah. Therefore, receiving an enthusiastic reply from Deema Arabia ruled out the other candidates, which were smaller in size to Deema Arabia. As such, the nature of the company, in addition to the accessibility factor, made Deema Arabia the most suitable option for my research fieldwork.

Deema Arabia's headquarters are in a large and modern nine-story building in one of Jeddah's most prestigious areas (AlKhaledya). In my interview with the HR executive manager, he explained that this location, in addition to the modern atmosphere, are part of the management's desire to project a certain image: specifically, that Deema Arabia is a strong player in the global health insurance market. The location is specifically chosen to make it more accessible to Jeddah's elite.

In addition to offices, Deema Arabia's site also houses a large restaurant where employees from all levels have their lunch breaks and chat. In some ways, Deema Arabia's site is like a small town with its own guards, caretakers and gardeners as well as its own mail delivery system, gym, mosque, nursery and restaurant. This setup clearly adds to my perception of Deema Arabia as a CoP.

Naturally, Deema Arabia employees differ in terms of their organizational roles. In an organization the size of Deema Arabia, the roles cover a large number of levels, from the CEO to board members, executive managers and heads of departments, down to service assistants and first-line employees. Although each individual in Deema Arabia has a certain title and a clearly defined role, many employees have other roles and responsibilities at work, such as employee representatives in the corporate committee. Deema Arabia has five main functional departments that are typical of any health insurance company. These departments are: underwriting and claims, accounting and finance, marketing and sales, human resources, and information technology. Under each department, there are a number of divisions. The executive managers of

the different functional departments are Saudi, and their offices are on the top floor of the Deema Arabia building. Heads of departments constitute middle management, as they are the ones in direct contact with the employees and everyday activities.

Deema Arabia prides itself on the fact that most of its staff members have university degrees: the majority have business backgrounds, some have medical backgrounds (GPs and nurses) and, interestingly, a considerable number have BAs in English language. There are some postgraduate degree holders, including the CEO and his vice-president. In addition to these groups, all departments of Deema Arabia also employ secretaries and other administrators with high diplomas (a qualification between a high school certificate and a bachelor degree). Employees also include unskilled workers filling positions such as service assistants or janitors. The diversity in tasks and in education is in fact even greater than this brief summary portrays.

In terms of age range, a large number of employees are in their late twenties and early thirties. This is another aspect the CEO of Deema Arabia claims to be a point of strength in its workforce, saying, 'We do not require experience because we can give them that. What we look for in our youth is talent, Saudi talent' (Interview with Mix FM Radio 25/12/2012). Despite these claims, the Saudi Ministry of Labour exerts pressure on private sector organizations to employ Saudis in order to deal with the high rates of unemployment. This explains the Saudi majority in the workforce, despite the fact that employing Saudis costs more than employing international employees, due to the fact that the Ministry of Labour enforces a minimum wage for Saudis. This law is described as 'racist' by some of the international staff members, as it is applied differently for different nationalities. This law undermines the sense of a community in the company, an emerging theme in the interview data; however, since it is not directly related to my research objectives, the theme of Saudization will not be discussed further.

It was not possible for me to access official records and obtain exact information on employees' national backgrounds during my fieldwork. Initially, the recruitment manager did not agree to see me for an interview, but the HR executive manager asked him later to meet with me and answer

my questions in regards to the demographics of Deema Arabia employees. He agreed to see me for ten minutes to give me general estimates. Based on this meeting, I can make the following observations. Saudis constitute the majority as they comprise 52% of the 1800 employee workforce. Other Arab nationalities (namely Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian and North African) constitute around 12% of the employees. The rest come from south Asian countries (namely India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, along with a significant number from the Philippines). As for Europeans, there is one Danish employee and one Spanish employee (both are new converts to Islam and wanted to live near the holy sites, according to the recruitment manager). In addition there is a number of British employees from Asian backgrounds (around 3). From the Americas, there are a number of Arab Americans and Canadians and only one white Canadian. Some of these international employees are immigrants; that is, they did not come to Saudi Arabia for the purpose of working at Deema Arabia, but secured a job there through the same process as Saudi citizens.

Some British employees come from the mother company in London to work in Deema Arabia for shorter or longer periods of time for training and monitoring purposes. Only three white British employees have been recruited directly to Deema Arabia, and they all have executive positions. As this overview reveals, Deema Arabia has a diverse international workforce with varied linguacultural backgrounds. The unique makeup of the staff members makes Deema Arabia an ideal context in which to study the use of BELF in a Saudi MNC.

Corporate culture is one of the most important aspects of an ethnographic account of a company (see also Wenger *et al.*, 2002). I formed my perceptions of Deema's organizational culture through my daily observations and the interactions recorded in my fieldnotes. Reading the employee magazine and using the intranet provided me with further input. The Deema Arabia culture became an important theme in the ethnographic interviews, and was often intertwined with narratives about individual experiences of working for Deema.

One very salient aspect of the corporate culture, especially in relation to my research, is the emphasis on internationalism. World maps portraying the company's international reach are on the walls everywhere inside Deema Arabia's premises. Pictures of customers from different races, veiled and unveiled females, and men in both traditional Saudi dress as well as suits are also everywhere. However, the emphasis on the Saudi frame of reference becomes clear in Arabic versions of the company's banners. The HR executive manager describes this as 'the Saudi flavour' in my interview with him. He adds that 'this is the reason we attached the word "Arabia" to Deema's name, to distinguish it and to make it more local'. This 'local internationalism' was described as an organizational resource more than once in my frequent interviews with the HR executive manager.

Other aspects of Deema Arabia's culture (e.g. the company's sense of social responsibility and the high level of decentralization) emerged in my data. However, since they do not bear direct relevance to my research questions, they will not be discussed in this thesis. In the next section, I discuss business meetings as one of the forms of mutual engagement of Deema Arabia's CoPs.

5.3.1 Meetings in Deema Arabia

Because meetings are by far the most structured form of interactions in business organizations, and because they present the naturally occurring data required for the discursive analysis in this research, studying them as an integral part of the members' mutual engagement is essential. There are many different contextual factors that affect the dynamics and the formality of a business meeting. The most important contextual factor is the nature of the relationship between different participants in a business meeting. It is also a huge determiner of the atmosphere and the type of discourse employed in these meetings. In Deema Arabia, like in all other organizations, meetings can be either internal or external. I was allowed to attend only internal meetings. These internal meetings can be categorized either as manager-subordinate meetings or as peer meetings. Peer meetings involve participants from the same or similar managerial status or level. In all of these meetings, the relationship was determined by the goals of the meeting and the institutionally sanctioned power relationships between the speakers: the hierarchy of power was usually clearly defined by the roles of the meeting participants (see also

Holmes and Stubbe, 2003). This plays a major role in the dynamics of meetings and the discursive practices employed in them. In peer meetings, however, the power relationship was less clear, and my interpretation (based on some entries in my fieldnotes) was that members of the CoP are naturally collegial and respectful of each other's professional roles.

Internal meetings in Deema Arabia can also be categorized in terms of purpose or function. Such categories include planning meetings, reporting meetings or problem-oriented meetings (see Holmes and Stubbe, 2003 for similar categorization). Again, each of these categories has impact on the dynamics and the discourse of the meeting. As such, I explain the context of each meeting from which extracts are taken for the purpose of interactional sociolinguistic analysis in the two following chapters. These include the meeting participants, their L1s, the title/purpose of the meeting and the position of each interlocutor.

As my participant observation has revealed, meetings were organized on short notice in the majority of the cases. Due to the 'rapid flow of information' (Wenger, 1998: 125) among the Deema staff, just like in any other CoP, this short notice rarely poses a problem. This is because their CoP has always been in the habit of arranging last minute meetings, particularly in cases of problem solving meetings; there was always a 'quick set-up of a problem to be discussed' (ibid.). All of the meetings I attended started with clear agendas, and in four out of nine meetings, meeting agendas were circulated in advance to make everybody aware of the meeting participants and the topic/problem. Justin, my only NS interviewee, stressed the importance of compiling a meeting agenda and circulating it prior to the meeting as a way to ensure efficiency and proper preparation. Some of my participants actually stated that they prefer to know the reason behind the meeting in order to prepare for it, which indicates the validity of Justin's insistence on circulating meeting agendas in advance. In every meeting, the department secretary took the meeting minutes in detail in order to save them in the department's database and to circulate a summary of the minutes after the meeting.

Deema's internal meetings were very frequent within the departments, across different departments and across different organizational levels. I cannot give an exact figure of how many meetings occurred across the organization in a week, but I can say that in the IT Services

department, there was at least one departmental meeting per week that required the presence of all the department staff, in addition to other smaller meetings with fewer participants.

As for external meetings, the relationships between participants were determined by the contractual status between Deema and the other company, as the HR executive explained to me. I do not have any data from these meetings as they are usually confidential in nature; as such, it is difficult to obtain the consent of the external participants prior to the meeting. Additionally, data from external meetings with participants cannot contribute as valuably as internal meetings to my research, which adopts a 'community' approach. In the next section, I discuss my research guiding assumptions.

5.4 Guiding assumptions

The present study takes a social constructionist approach. The interpretive, social constructionist approach assumes that members of any social system—including business organizations—'enact their particular worlds through social interaction. Reality is a social product, which cannot be understood apart from the intersubjective meanings of the social actors involved in its enactment' (Rosen, 1991: 3). As such, the study draws on the assumption that meaning and realities are constructed, not just discovered, and the researcher's engagement with the participants and with the research itself plays a crucial role in the type of reality depicted (Duff, 2008). Interpretation is the supreme goal of ethnographic research because meaning is understood in the social constructionist field to derive from interpretation, where knowledge is significant only if it is meaningful (Rosen, 1991). An ethnographic explanation is accepted as meaningful if it appears reasonable against the established explicit and implicit assumptions about social process and if the framework and data the ethnographer offers can be associated against the interpretation framework systematized in prior (ibid.).

Regarding the nature of realities, I assumed, like Lave and Wenger (1991: 151), that 'objective forms and systems of activity, on the one hand, and agents' subjective and intersubjective understandings of them, on the other, mutually constitute both the world and its experienced forms'. With this in mind, I planned to design my data collection in a way that elicits the participants' emic (participant-based) perspectives and insights. This was not meant to elicit emic views with the aim of matching them against some external truth, but rather with the purpose of shedding new light on the phenomena under investigation (Codó, 2008). Once the participants' views were available for analysis, they were triangulated with my etic (researcher-led) observations. This blend of emic and etic views is an intrinsic feature of ethnographic research (Agar, 1996). What eventually emerged out of this undertaking is best seen as a version of reality jointly produced by the researcher and the participants of the research.

Regarding the researcher's role in creating a version of reality, reflexivity about the researcher's influence on the data throughout the process is practiced. That is, I am fully aware of the fact that the elicited data reflect a careful consideration of who the researcher/participant is, what each one presumably knows and what their relation to each other is. Therefore, while the present study is based on a systematic enquiry, and was conducted according to clearly justified principles, it also provides an account of what the researcher perceived (Heller, 2008). That is, if another researcher undertakes the same study, they will potentially produce a different version of reality.

Finally, the present study is an ethnographically oriented, qualitative, applied linguistic inquiry. As explained in the previous section, ethnographic research aims to understand the socioculturally based perspective that underlies knowledge, guides behaviour and shapes interactions within a given community; thus, an ethnographic researcher needs to learn as much about the participants and their views as possible (Heigham and Croker, 2009). To that end, the present study adopts an emic, contextualised and naturalistic perspective. The emic perspective requires a detailed and clear understanding of the participants' views, beliefs and attitudes; contextualization requires a thorough and profound understanding of the research site; the naturalistic perspective necessitates the examination of language in use in its actual setting (Smit, 2010).

5.5 Ethnography and adopting an ethnographic perspective

Ethnography can refer both to the product, the final presentation of analysis and interpretation of the complete study, and to the research process-method itself (Heigham and Croker, 2009). Generally, ethnography aspires to understand and explain the practices, values and behaviours of cespacific communities 'with particular reference to the cultural basis for those behaviours and values' (Duff, 2008: 34). Additionally, ethnography aims to 'learn about what counts as membership and appropriate participation' (Green *et al.*, 2003: 210) in a specific community. From a linguistic perspective, ethnography enables researchers to examine how language use relates to the conditions of people's everyday activities, and to discover how and why certain language practices gain significance in participants' environments (Heller, 2008). By making the community's tacit cultural knowledge explicit, ethnography helps in capturing complexities, contradictions and consequences (*ibid.*). It does not, unlike many other approaches, 'try to reduce the complexity of social events by focusing *a priori* on a selected range of relevant features, but rather tries to describe and analyse the complexity of social events comprehensively' (Blommaert, 2008: 682). This comprehensive essence of ethnographic research is what Marcus (1995) calls 'totality', which is an uncontroversial quality of ethnography. It provides a detailed and profound understanding of the cultural practices of a given community, which other research methods rarely allow for. One reason this can be achieved is that ethnographic studies are usually fluid and flexible, and the research questions employed in these studies can be dynamic, subject to constant revision and redefined as the research continues to uncover new knowledge (Heigham and Croker, 2009). Ethnographic researchers do not have clear-cut hypotheses they aim to test; instead they face topics they cannot clearly understand and hope to gain some insights through research. Agar (1996) argues that in linguistic ethnography, the concern is accounting for things and understanding them rather than predicting them. This quality of adopting an ethnographic perspective is what makes it fit for the purposes of my research. As presented in section [5.2](#), my research questions are general in nature; thus, adopting a flexible approach that allows for their continuous modification seems inevitable, given the likely complexities a study of this nature may reveal.

Notably, a key principle of ethnography is its holistic perspective (Bloome *et al.*, 2005). This perspective suggests that any data analyses and representations of those analyses need to be positioned within the cultural context of the participants and also within the research program and goals of the researcher. As such, the researcher maintains accountability to the people being studied and to the research commitments (Skukauskaite, 2012). In general, ethnography, as an approach that is participant- rather than analyst-motivated, makes local interpretations fundamental to the overall analysis. It also requires researchers to collect relevant linguistic data and to analyse them while considering the physical, sociocultural and linguistic contexts in which language is used (Duff, 2008). To this end, ethnographic researchers collect different types of data and tie them together (Heller, 2008). As Silverman (2006: 67) explains, they look, listen, record and ask, and thus combine observational data with interview data. In fact, the triangulation of multiple sources and methods is a fundamental characteristic of ethnographic research in addition to singularity, which refers to the small number of individuals or social practices investigated (Duff, 2008).

The present study attempts to meet the above description of ethnographic research. For instance, with regard to singularity, the data will be collected from the members of one particular CoP—specifically, an MNC in Saudi Arabia as a BELF CoP. With regard to triangulation, the data in this study is collected from a variety of data sources through a variety of methods and from a variety of participants. The multiple methods will include observing and recording the participant business professionals in their everyday activities, and meeting with them for interviews (detailed descriptions of my research methods will follow in section [5.6](#)).

To narrow down the broad label of 'ethnography', Green and Bloome (1997) developed a typology of ethnographic research that has varying degrees of integration with the target community. This typology consists of three principal categories: doing ethnography, adopting an ethnographic perspective and using ethnographic tools. My study does not meet their criteria of 'doing ethnography', which they describe as 'a broad, in-depth, and long-term study of a social or cultural group'. Although spending a long time in the context investigated (commonly a minimum of one year) is important and very rewarding, often producing a 'thick description' and a rich

analysis, seeking a timely completion of the study makes it difficult to achieve. Although this is a three-year research project, it still does not qualify as 'doing' ethnography; as pointed out by Green and Bloome (1997), 'doing' ethnography is not only based on the length of time spent on site, but also on the comprehensiveness of its account. Such a detailed and comprehensive account was not possible in this study as it required more time spent not only at the research site, but also on the data analysis and the process of writing up the findings. Therefore, this study is not 'doing' ethnography per se. Rather, my research resonates with what Green and Bloome (1997: 183) demarcate as studies that 'adopt an ethnographic perspective': those that take a more focused approach to studying particular aspects of the cultural practices of a social group. My research also fulfils what Hymes (1996: 5) calls 'topic-oriented' ethnography, as the study has a narrower focus on language use in the target CoP.

As clearly stated by Green and Bloome (1997), adopting an ethnographic perspective requires understanding and the formulation of explicit theories guiding the study. In ethnographic research, 'theory is inseparable from methodology', since research methods are tied to the objects of their study (Bloome *et al.*, 2004) and conceptualizations of objects of study are partially shaped by the views of the researcher. Therefore, adopting an ethnographic perspective 'implies drawing on theories of culture and language to examine and understand the practices and meanings co-constructed by participants interacting in social situations' (Skukauskaitė, 2012).

Smit (2010) rightly argues that, as any popular research method, ethnography suffers from overuse and thus underspecificity, leading to confusion. She suggests labelling ethnography to specify it; in this vein, she labels her study as 'a discourse- pragmatic ethnography' (p. 86). I was tempted to use this label to describe my research because Smit is a prominent ELF researcher, whose work on ELF in higher education strongly commits to the principles of ethnographic research. However, her description of what this label entails is very similar to the long-established tradition of 'linguistic ethnography', which will be the focus of the next section.

5.5.1 Linguistic ethnography

What is commonly termed 'linguistic ethnography' has emerged as the best methodological framework within which I can describe my current research design, data collection and analysis. Linguistic ethnography comprises 'a number of more specific traditions that share a commitment to putting linguistics and ethnography together in order to understand the social processes in which individuals are involved' (Rampton, 2007: 599). This methodological development has its roots in Dell Hymes' works in the 1960s to 1970s that call for a descriptive scientific of language, in which the analytic frame of reference would be ethnographic rather than linguistic (ibid.). As explained in section [4.5](#) on competence, Hymes' call emerged in reaction to Noam Chomsky's exclusive emphasis on universal grammar in linguistics (Tusting and Maybin, 2007). Being social-constructionist in their stance, linguistic ethnographers hold that 'close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity' (Rampton *et al.*, 2004: 2). A distinctive feature of linguistic ethnography when compared with traditional ethnography, therefore, is its insistence on interactional evidence in which individuals express broader social meanings. In other words, both an ethnographic perspective and a linguistic analysis contribute to one cohesive approach under linguistic ethnography. Harris and Rampton (2010: 109) state that this is significant because 'for a fuller, or indeed maybe for even only an adequate understanding of what people mean when they speak, the combination of linguistics, interaction analysis and ethnography provides valuable support'.

According to Rampton (2007), in combining linguistics and ethnography to understand social practices, ethnographers and linguists differ in their view of the extent to which their objects of study can be codified. These differences constitute an 'in-principle tension between linguistic and ethnographic methodologies' (ibid.: 596). Despite such tension, there are key benefits resulting from the combination of these two apparently distant disciplines. The key advantage of such a set-up is that, on the one hand, ethnography is said to open linguistics up, inviting reflexive sensitivity to the procedures involved in the production of linguistic assertions by embedding it in rich, ethnographic descriptions of how users of a given variety adapt their linguistic practices to

different situational contexts. On the other hand, linguistics and linguistically sensitive discourse analysis 'ties ethnography down', increasing the volume of gathered data that is open to falsification, 'a set of highly developed tools for analysing and uncovering unnoticed intricacies in the discursive processes through which cultural relationships and identities are produced' (ibid.).

5.6 Research methods and techniques

Ethnographic studies generally differ from other forms of qualitative research. As Heath and Street (2008) explain, qualitative research often adopts one or more of the 'face-to-face methods of inquiry', such as interviewing, and the chosen methods are rarely grounded in 'conceptual frameworks... from a particular social science discipline' (Heath and Street, 2008: 29). In contrast, ethnography as a paradigm, as outlined above in section 5.5, relies on some connection with linguistic anthropology. Heath and Street further this point and describe ethnography as a 'theory-building enterprise constructed through detailed systematic observing, recording, and analysing of human behaviour in specifiable spaces and interactions' (ibid.: 29). Adopting this view in my fieldwork, I employed the following research methods: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, audio-recordings of naturally occurring conversations and retrospective group interviews.

5.6.1 Observation

Schensul *et al.* (1999: 91) define observation as the 'process of learning through exposure to/involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting'. Atkinson and Hammersley (1994: 284) state that ethnographic research relies 'substantially or partly on "participant observation"'⁶. Because it is a constructivist, interpretive approach, participant observation allowed me to capture not only BELF participants' language use, but also

⁶ I call myself a participant observer following Heigham and Croker (2009), who assert that obtaining an official role within the research site is not an essential criterion in conducting participant observation. According to them, participation can simply mean having regular contact and conversing with the participants during the fieldwork.

their sociocultural practices as expressed through language use. ELF speakers are known to exploit the potential of the language when they are fully focused on the purpose of the talk and on their interlocutors as people, rather than on the linguistic code itself (cf. Seidlhofer, 2008). In my research, I observed my participants as they were absorbed in the ad-hoc, situated negotiation of meaning to find out how they, motivated by the communicative purpose and the dynamics of the interaction, make use of their multilingual repertoires.

As Atkinson and Hammersley (1994: 256) put it, participant observation is 'egalitarian', as both the researcher and the participants are inhabitants of a shared social space. The epistemology of participant observation lies in the 'reciprocity of perspectives' between both parties of social actors (ibid.). With Conversation Analysis (CA), qualitative interviews and, to a much lesser extent, questionnaire surveys, methods that have been extensively employed in ELF research to date, there is somewhat a lack of such reciprocity as the researchers are more readily able to prioritise a certain aspect of the participants' everyday interactions to look at specifically. This explains the contrast found in some of the literature. For instance, as outlined in section in [4.2.1.1](#), using the tools of CA, Firth (1996) finds that his participants dealt with ambiguities in ELF talk by the let-it-pass strategy, whereas Kaur (2009), also drawing on findings from CA, asserts that understanding is actively co-constructed by the different participants in a certain communicative event. Although Firth's data came from telephone conversations, whereas Kaur's ELF interactions were face-to-face, they both followed the CA traditions in analysing tape recordings of naturally occurring conversations with no discussion of any relevant contextual factors.

Conducting observation can compensate for such methodological shortcomings. It obliges the researcher to be sensitive to the context of the participants' meaning-making practices instead of purely focusing on the propositional content of the participant's utterances, and to be attentive to cases that clearly stand out (Blommaert and Jie, 2010: 28). Although adopting an ethnographic perspective has been promoted by prominent ELF researchers (cf. Seidlhofer, 2004; Dewey, 2009), the actual application of ethnographic research to date has been limited. Some notable examples include Baker (2009), Cogo and Dewey (2012), Ehrenreich (2009) and Smit (2010). Ethnographic observation, being a form of immersion in the community under investigation, gives

researchers access to the fluidity of the participants' experiences and enhances their sensitivity to interactions and the processes that underlie them (Emerson *et al.*, 1995). It demands that researchers refrain from unassumingly privileging what they personally consider as remarkable over the mundane (Bryman and Bell, 2011: 423). Blommaert and Jie (2010) comment that when carrying out participant observation, one should 'start by observing *everything* and gradually start focusing on *specific targets*' (ibid.: 29, original emphasis). Therefore, during the first weeks of my fieldwork, I tried to pay attention to every aspect of the company's communication. Gradually, I started having informal conversations with the participants as part of the observational stage, as will be explained in section [5.6.2.1](#). Such regular interchange between participant and nonparticipant observations corresponds to Duranti's (1997: 102) view that 'ethnographers must routinely alternate between moments of high involvement and moments of low involvement in the activities that surround them'.

I asked the HR manager to be placed in a functional department where English is the only language for communication. Although I wanted to have a wider scope for the first phase of my data collection with the intention of later narrowing my focus, I still selected only one department in order to better apply the CoP model. Considering the majority of the employees are Saudi, I also had the concern that I would find myself listening to and observing Arabs speaking Arabic, especially in light of previous research (e.g. Ehrenreich, 2009, 2010), which shows that when speakers share a first language, they tend to communicate in it even when English is the official corporate language. Therefore, I emphasized the need to be placed in a department in which the employees came from different linguacultural backgrounds. Thus, I was placed in the IT services department as it fit the purposes of my research, and my fieldwork began formally.

Tusting and Maybin (2007: 578) argue that it is intrinsic to any ethnographic research that the researcher, as a participant observer, is part of what is going on. And since this observation happens within a single target community, it allows for the recording of the behaviour as it occurs, 'instead of depending on people's reports of their past or expected behaviour'. Thus, the behaviours researchers observe should not be significantly different from the behaviour that occurs in their absence, which can provide an accurate depiction of a given situation (Heigham

and Croker, 2009). However, sensitivity to the implications of this is at the centre of the ethnographic endeavour. It could mean that the researcher is unavoidably part of, and shapes, the research that is being produced. This reflexivity is an issue in all social sciences research, but is particularly problematic in ethnographic research. Ethnographic work generally needs the researcher to be actively involved in the social phenomenon of study, indicating that this generates insights that cannot be achieved in any other way. However, it can be said that the involvement of the researcher in social action necessarily changes the practices under study, either through direct involvement in these actions or simply through the presence of recording equipment of which participants are aware (Tusting and Maybin, 2007). 'Participation in language practices as a researcher is inevitably different in nature from that of the people involved', no matter how 'insider' the researcher's position becomes; their involvement will have an inevitable impact on the practices under investigation (ibid.: 578).

Duranti (1997: 118) also argues that so-called 'neutral observation' does not exist, and that 'being a social actor, a participant in any situation and in any role, means to be part of the situation and hence affect it'. In other words, there will always be an observer's effect, which it is very important to acknowledge. This was something I was mindful of from the outset; my being a linguist—and the participants' awareness of this fact—possibly influenced the nature of the interactions in my presence. In fact, it is precisely this observer's effect that made some ELF researchers (e.g. Kaur, 2009) refrain from conducting observation. In my research, this effect was very significant in the early stage of my fieldwork; that is, when I was still new to the company and unknown to the staff. It gradually weakened as my presence continued, but I cannot assume that it disappeared completely. Blommaert and Jie (2010) talking about classroom ethnography, argue that by the 25th time a researcher is present in a room and taking notes, it is likely the participants 'have long started seeing [the researcher] as part of the décor and take no notice of [the researcher] anymore'. They argue that the learning process is 'mutual' as

... the others learn about you, get used to your presence and start understanding what you are after; you start to get accustomed to the normal ways of organising the activities and the patterns such activities take... This mutual learning process becomes the 'common ground' between researchers and subjects, the thing that enables particular forms of interaction to take place and particular kinds of knowledge to travel between the two parties (Blommaert and Jie, 2010: 28).

Therefore, I can say that being present at the company on a daily basis and establishing a rapport by conversing with the staff members regularly might have eventually lessened the observer's effect on the data. Additionally, the drawing on a range of qualitative research methods employed in this research contributed to the achievement of an elaborate comprehensive description and led to gaining greater insights into the CoP.

Observation requires different forms of recording to complement it. Since video recording is considered intrusive and may discourage participation in my research (Bryman and Bell, 2011); I did not consider video recording either my interviews or my observations. Instead, I used two different forms of recording: audio-recording and fieldnotes. Audio-recording was used to record naturally occurring interactions during business meetings and fieldnotes were used for other speech events, as well as to record my own experience at the research site, as explained in the following sections.

5.6.1.1 Audio-recording

As a linguistic ethnographic enquiry, participant observation makes possible the study of the contexts of communication, such as the participants' social relations and interactional histories, which can only be grasped ethnographically (Rampton, 2009), whereas audio-recording of naturally occurring conversations is a useful tool for collecting verbal data that provide essential details of the actual construction of meaning in a situated communicative event. Psathas (1995: 45) defines naturally occurring interactions as 'interactional phenomena that would have occurred regardless of whether the researcher had come upon the scene'. Complementing the observational data, the recorded conversational data were also of relevance to my study as it aims to look into the participants' management of intercultural communication in the 'linguistic and textual fine-grain' of their everyday talk (Rampton, 2009: 236). These recordings also provided me with the 'raw data' that eventually substantiated my analysis as 'evidence' and 'examples' (Blommaert and Jie, 2010: 31).

Regarding the technical merits of audio-recording, I was able to focus on a particular communicative event while it was taking place, and during the analysis I was able to replay it a number of times. Thus, enough attention was paid to all the small details during the stage of data

analysis (Duranti, 1997). Recorded data also made playback sessions and retrospective interviews (discussed below in section [5.6.2.2](#)) possible and even more productive as the interactions were played back to the participants. Recorded data can also be made available to other researchers in order to verify the validity of the analysis and of my interpretations (ibid.). Audio-recording the participants' naturally occurring conversations is preferred over other forms of elicited talk. As Harris (2006: 90) explains, how people interact in 'routine unselfconscious speech is a remarkably tenacious marker of place'. Similarly, Wagner and Gardner (2004) argue that naturally occurring data are qualitatively richer than elicited data as they contain greater interactional details.

For the purposes of this research project, I recorded only formal business meetings as forms of naturally occurring interactions. I chose meetings for several reasons. First, as Pullin Stark (2009: 153) explains, meetings are 'bounded speech events', so they allow 'fine-grained analysis of goal-related interaction over a series of turns'. She adds that this characteristic of meetings as speech events is clearly important in analysing the building, maintenance and repair of relationships. Second, obtaining permission to record other naturally occurring interactions in the business environment can be very difficult. In fact, as Charles (2007) explains, one reason for not having enough empirical research in the field of BELF could be the difficulty of getting a company's consent to record its BELF interactions. According to Charles (ibid.: 270), 'research cooperation in the form of surveys and interviews is one thing; permission to record interactions is another. Questions of confidentiality loom larger than anywhere else'. Therefore, confining audio-recordings to meetings was more feasible. Meetings vary in terms of the nature of topics discussed; they can be about very sensitive and confidential issues, or they can be related to less sensitive matters, in which case my presence as a researcher was not threatening or endangering to the company's confidentiality. Finally, as the number of participants in a meeting is limited with far fewer chances of interruption from non-participants, obtaining consent to record from all the participants is more achievable than recording other forms of interactions.

During the attended meetings, I placed the microphone/audio-recorder in the middle of the meeting table. I let the participants know that they could control the microphone while they were being recorded. Thus, in case a sensitive topic arose, the microphone could be turned off. It

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should be noted that the novelty of using microphones may have potentially influenced what the participants said (Rampton, 1991). To lessen this undesirable effect, Rampton (*ibid.*) suggests recording over a number of consecutive sessions to allow the novelty of having a microphone enough time to diminish, and later play back the recordings to the participants to see ‘whether or not they gave a fair picture of normal practice’ (p. 393). Table 1 below details the meetings I attended in Deema Arabia.

Table 1 Recoded meetings

Meeting title	Length in minutes	Number of participants
Executive quarterly meeting	175	18
HR quarterly meeting	235	21
Urgent problem-solving cross-departmental (IT+ HR) meeting	95	12
Facilities unit problem solving meeting	60	6
Pre-Eid break closing meeting of the corporate services department	65	35
IT Ramadan working hours allocation	75	19
IT leading team with executive board to discuss a proposal	55	17
The services department’s quarterly meeting	80	38

5.6.1.2 Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes are defined as ‘accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher [makes] while observing in an intense manner’ (Emerson *et al.*, 1995: 19). They complement participant observation and other forms of data, such as interviews and audio-recordings (*ibid.*). They also offer a written record, which supports the data analysis that may take place months

after the research was carried out (Dörnyei, 2007). However, it is accepted that descriptions in fieldnotes are never interpretation-free, and should not in any case be treated as factual accounts (Emerson *et al.*, 2011). Nonetheless, there is still the need to document, as accurately as possible, a range of events, encounters and conversations (*ibid.*).

I took fieldnotes to document my personal experiences and observations of the participants' language use and intercultural experiences at the company. As explained above, audio-recording is not feasible as a tool at all business speech events. As I spent some time observing my participants using language while immersed in their work tasks, I needed to take notes of interesting discourse practices and language use. Even when audio-recording was taking place, I used fieldnotes to record a description of the physical context.

5.6.2 Interviews

Interviews, according to Richards (2003), form the mainstay of qualitative research. Interviews can provide an effective way to elicit in-depth personal information in a way that is less intrusive than observation. They can also help explain motivations, attitudes and other issues that might be resistant to observation, and can help the researcher gain an understanding of personal perspectives in a way that would be difficult to achieve through surveys, or from observation alone (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Additionally, as Bryman and Bell (*ibid.*) argue, the flexibility of interviews makes them very attractive as a research tool. In studies of language and culture, interviews are widely used to provide ethnographic information on participants' views and settings, which can then be used to provide different perspectives on situations or to aid in the explanation of communicative interactions (cf. Gumperz, 2003; Saville-Troike, 2003; Scollon and Scollon, 1995).

Traditionally, as Bryman and Bell (2011: 467) explain, interview data vary depending on the structure of the interview, which may range from formal (i.e. structured interviews with rigid sets of questions and schedules) to less structured (i.e. semi-structured interview with a general interview guide) or to free conversations (i.e. unstructured interview with no pre-set questions or schedule). However, it is important to be aware of the subjective, or rather the intersubjective (Cohen *et al.*,

2000: 267), nature of interviews. The data elicited depends on how the interview is constructed between the interviewer and interviewee. Recent research on using interviews in qualitative applied linguistics research suggests that interviews should be conceptualized as socially situated speech events 'in which the interviewer(s) and the interviewee(s) make meaning and co-construct knowledge and participate in social practices' (Tamly and Richards, 2011: 2; see also Heller, 2008). In this research, I employed two different types of semi-structured interviews; each one is designed to elicit a different type of data, as explained in the following two sections.

5.6.2.1 Ethnographic interviews

Ethnographic interviews are open-ended semi-structured interviews, and their major characteristic is 'active listening' (Silverman, 2006: 110), which involves giving the participants space to talk freely. I conducted these interviews with the help of an interview guide; that is, a set of issues and possible questions that I prepared prior to the interviews. I intended this guide to be a checklist that would help me deal with the relevant topics based on my initial observations as well as findings reported in the ELF/BELF literature.

I first asked my participants about their 'facesheet' information (Bryman and Bell, 2011: 475). This included age, position in the company and number of years employed. This type of information was necessary to contextualize their responses in relation to their current professional and social status (ibid.) Additionally, I tried to explore the participants' English language learning histories, their current language learning situations (if applicable; see section [5.3](#) on research site), their attitudes and beliefs about language learning, and their attitudes towards using English as their official corporate language.

In the next stage, I asked my participants broad descriptive questions about their use of English in their everyday business routines. The purpose of these questions was to get the participants to reflect on their linguistic practices and show how they were using them. Thus, I gave the participants room to point out some of the interesting aspects they noticed and the aspects they considered important, and which I may not have noticed or considered important (Kalocsai, 2009). As the interview progressed, new topics emerged, which presented more issues for discussion throughout the course of the interview.

These ethnographic interviews had major advantages. First, they helped me elicit emic views that helped me develop an ethnographic account of the participants' sociocultural practices. Secondly, they helped me build a rapport with the participants, which further supported an in-depth understanding of the setting (Silverman, 2006). Establishing a rapport with the participants requires 'attempting to see the world from the participants' viewpoint without going native' (Fontana and Frey, 2000: 655).

The language I used for the interviews was English, as it was the corporate language and the participants' ability to speak English was a prerequisite for working at the company. However, when a participant switched to Arabic, I too switched in order to accommodate their preference and to ensure that they were expressing themselves freely and comfortably. As explained above, the interviews were semi-structured with a prepared interview guide. This guide was modified in relation to the needs of each interview (Bryman and Bell, 2011). However, some degree of standardization was still needed in these interviews in order to facilitate the making of comparisons between participants' backgrounds and attitudes towards the same topics (ibid.).

In addition to the scheduled interviews described above, I also engaged in informal conversations with the participants during their lunch breaks. As part of these casual conversations, I engaged the participants in an informal interviewing process. In this manner, I could ask them direct or 'on-the-spot questions' that were relevant to my research aims (see Kalocsai, 2009). I did not audio-record these conversations, but I did record them in my fieldnotes. These informal talks also helped me to get to know my participants as people, and helped me further build a rapport with them.

It is important to note here that recruiting interviewees was somewhat difficult. After I made myself known to as many staff members as possible, I started following up with potential participants to ask their permission to let me interview them. From the 75 information sheets distributed, only 6 that gave consent were returned without having to ask again or send reminders. After further prompting, an additional 14 participants came forward. I conducted 20 interviews, most of which were based on the conversations I had with the participants, not on the information sheets. Table 2 below lists my interview participant information (based on the chronological order of the interviews).

Table 2 Ethnographic interview participants

Participant pseudonym		Position	Nationality	L1	Age	Gender	Years in BA
1	Will	IT services department manager	Filipino	Tagalog	43	M	16
2	Maha	Recruitment admin assistant	Saudi	Arabic	32	F	6 months
3	Fahad	Corporate service department manager	Saudi	Arabic	36	M	7
4	Hanaa	Facilities admin assistant	Syrian	Arabic	31	F	2
5	Mohyee	Facilities admin assistant	Moroccan	Arabic/ French	33	M	11 months
6	Haidar	IT services admin	Indian	Malayalam	31	M	5
7	Mazin	Employee relations director	Saudi	Arabic	37	M	8
8	Adel	Corporate services admin	Sudanese	Arabic	32	M	4
9	Omar	Call centre team leader	Pakistani	Urdu	34	M	7
10	Ben	IT services admin	Filipino	Tagalog	46	M	15
11	Tariq	HR executive manager	Saudi	Arabic	45	M	7
12	Najem	IT trainer	Pakistani	Urdu	29	M	4
13	Turki	Call centre team member	Saudi	Arabic	26	M	2
14	Bakor	Payroll and benefits manager	Saudi	Arabic	34	M	6
15	Ibtehal	CEO secretary	Palestinian	Arabic	32	F	9
16	Jaffer	Claims examiner	Indian	Hindi	39	M	2
17	Wesam	Financial analyst	Jordanian	Arabic	38	M	3
18	Majed	Claims examiner	Egyptian	Arabic	34	M	4
19	Justin	Claims and underwriting consultant	Canadian	English		M	1.5
20	Mamat	Janitor	Filipino	Tagalog	31	M	10

5.6.2.2 Retrospective interviews

The second type of interview I conducted is 'retrospective interviews' (cf. Cogo, 2012). These were the final set of interviews with the participants at the end of my fieldwork to discuss my interpretations and the participants' feelings and comments on the research, and to explore unresolved or interesting issues that arose during the course of data collection. These interviews were necessary to get participants' validation of my initial findings. They were also semi-structured and open-ended.

During these retrospective interviews, some extracts of the participants' speech were played back to them. I provided the interviewed participants with transcripts of episodes of their interactions that I was unable to comprehend without knowing their shared technical jargon or other shared business expressions, and I asked them to comment on them. These follow-up interviews were particularly useful when my fieldnotes, taken from my observations and containing my preliminary interpretations that shed light on the context of communications (Emerson *et al.*, 1995), were not enough to interpret an incident. This method strongly complemented the use of audio-recording, as thorough engagement with the speech data can reveal certain subtle issues that necessitate clarification from the participants' perspectives (Dörnyei, 2007). In a few cases, participants were also encouraged to explain retrospectively what was happening and what they were saying if the speakers in the extracts were present and their voices were not easily identifiable.

It is important to note that I could not arrange for individual retrospective interviews with my participants due to their tight schedules. Therefore, the only option I had was to arrange for two group retrospective interviews consisting of four participants in each interview. I grouped the participants who consented to see me for another interview on the basis of their L1s: Arabic speakers in one interview and non-Arabic speakers in the other. I made this grouping decision to give the Arabic speakers more freedom to switch to Arabic freely, which they frequently did. Table 3 below gives details of the two group retrospective interviews I conducted at Deema Arabia.

Table 3 Group retrospective interview participants

Retrospective interview 1		Retrospective interview 2	
Participant	L1	Participant	L1
Hanna	Arabic	Will	Tagalog
Mazin	Arabic	Omar	Urdu
Adel	Arabic	Najem	Urdu
Bakor	Arabic	Jaffar	Urdu

5.6.3 Fieldwork and data collection timeline

In this section, I generally describe the stages of my fieldwork. It should be noted that, as an ethnographic research project, the process of data collection is rather messy and less structured than other forms of qualitative research. This account is presented here as a broad description rather than an accurate one. I spent three months in Deema Arabia in the summer of 2013. On my first day at Deema Arabia, I had a lengthy meeting (1.5 hours) with the HR executive manager. I had to explain everything I was planning to do during my presence in Deema Arabia. The HR executive manager prepared a detailed confidentiality agreement for me to sign in order to protect their data, especially from their competitors. During this meeting, I asked to be placed in one functional department where English is the only language for communication (see section [5.6.1](#) above for relevant discussion). Thus, I was placed in the IT services department as it fitted the purposes of my research, and then my fieldwork began formally. I was given a desk, a computer and an employee card and access to most of the things Deema Arabia employees had access to.

During the first phase I carried out participant observation (see section [5.6.1](#)) with the aim of gaining an overview of the linguistic and social practices in the company overall. Although I was placed in a department, I did go around the premises and I gained the first insights into the organizational culture of the company, the demographics of its employees, the physical premises and some of the issues relating to language use and language choice that later became central in

my investigation. Most of this time was spent recruiting informants by giving out my information sheets and talking to the potential participants about my research. I usually did this during the employees' lunch breaks in the company's canteen. I spent the two hours that most employees choose as their break at the canteen, and I often moved from one table to another introducing myself and my research. I believe that the fact that these introductions happened during the employees' break hours is what made most of them relaxed and willing to listen. Sometimes I also spent the lunch break just sitting in the canteen to observe and listen to the employees as they were chatting while having their lunch. During this stage, I took detailed fieldnotes, a practice that soon became second nature to me. I introduced myself to a wide variety of the employees from varying organizational levels and a variety of linguacultural backgrounds. At the end of every workday, I spent almost an hour in my own office, planning my fieldwork, tidying up my fieldnotes and browsing the Deema Arabia intranet when I needed extra information.

In the next stage, after I made myself known to as many staff members as possible, I started approaching potential participants to let me interview them. I conducted 20 interviews, most of which were based on the conversations I had with the participants, not on the information sheets as explained in section [5.6.2](#). I continued my observation during this stage as well, but extensive recruiting and interviewing remain its main characteristics.

Finally, in the third stage, which covered the final month of my fieldwork, I wanted to be involved in the everyday activities of my participants, so I asked to be assigned a role in the department in which I was placed for my observation. This was also important as more employees were going away for holidays and the company needed to hire temps (as they usually do during holiday seasons). The role I was given was mainly secretarial, i.e. I had to direct the 'webmaster' and 'info' e-mails to the relevant division/department to deal with the clients' requests. Although this was a somewhat tiring task, and although it kind of distracted me from my original purpose, my research, it was also valuable to my research as my participants felt that having me around is necessary, and by this time, my outsider status was forgotten, and I could confidently call myself a 'participant observer'. Additionally, it made having the two retrospective group interviews (see section [5.6.2.2](#)), which took place on the last two days of my fieldwork, somewhat richer as it felt

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like conversations among colleagues rather than a discussion with an agenda.

Although I present my fieldwork here in three stages, as a study that adopts an ethnographic perspective, keen observation and taking fieldnotes were integral components of all the three stages, even during the interviews, which were audio-recorded. Additionally, as explained in section [5.6.1.1](#), for the purpose of collecting naturally-occurring spoken interactions, I attended, and sometimes recorded meetings from the IT services department and the HR department. Figure 2 below presents a general timeline of how my fieldwork and data collection in Deema Arabia went. It is important to note that, throughout the fieldwork, I engaged in integrated/simultaneous data collection and data analysis processes. The initial analysis was fed back into the ongoing process of data collection to help me identify specific areas that required greater investigation. The first stage of analysing data was through transcription, which will be the focus of the next section.

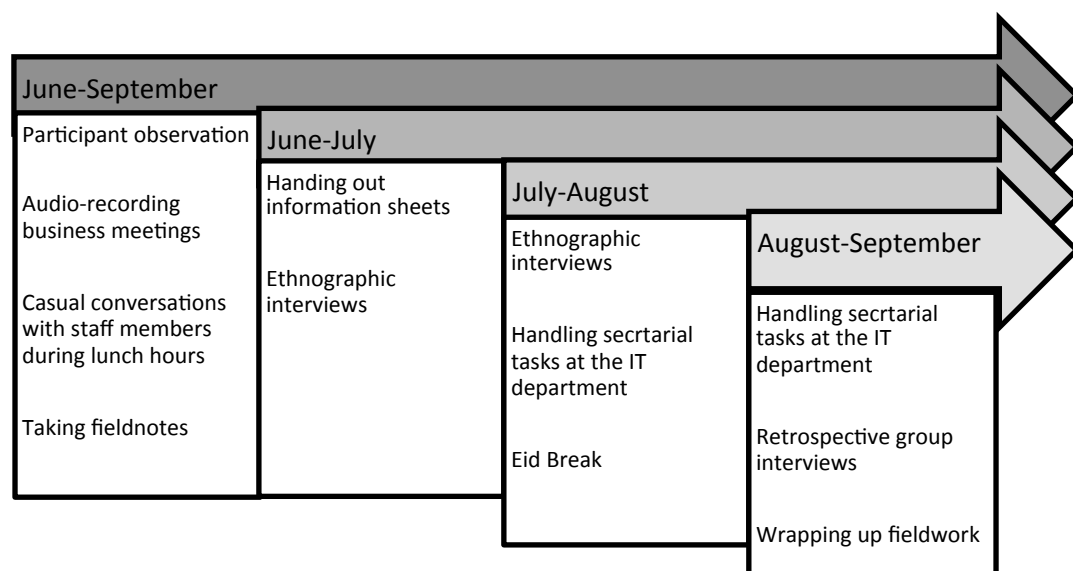


Figure 2 Data collection timeline

5.6.4 Transcription

The first phase of data analysis went hand-in-hand with the data collection and involved transcribing and coding the data. Since transcribing is in essence a representation and is often regarded as the first step of analysis (Cameron, 2001), it required careful decisions on my part as

to what to transcribe and how. In general, as Oliver *et al.*, (2005) transcription practices can be seen 'in terms of a continuum with two dominant modes: naturalism, in which every utterance is transcribed in as much detail as possible, and denaturalism, in which idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g. stutters, pauses, nonverbals, involuntary vocalizations) are removed'. Between these two modes, there are limitless variations using elements of each to achieve certain analytical objectives and research goals (*ibid.*).

For my interviews, I aimed to produce naturalized transcripts containing speech that represent how meanings and perceptions construct reality (Cameron, 2001). However, rather than including too many unnecessary, sometimes distracting, details, I only included features that I thought were relevant for my purposes, such as fillers, long pauses and laughter. I transcribed all the interviews in their full length. However, for the retrospective group interviews, I decided to be selective and transcribe only the relevant and telling parts. This is mainly because the participants in these discussions digressed to a variety of topics that, although generally interesting, were not relevant to my research purposes; such topics included the history of the Arab nation and some political issues. Transcribing group discussions is known to be considerably harder and more time-consuming than one-on-one interviews (*cf.* McLellan *et al.*, 2003); therefore, spending an excessive amount of time transcribing non-essential data seemed unnecessary.

Transcribing is a challenging procedure to say the least and, as Kaur (2008: 84) rightly argues, it is 'especially challenging in the case of ELF data where the occurrence of non-standard forms and usage is largely to be expected'. In transcribing naturally occurring conversations, in line with (Kaur, 2008), my main goal was to create a balance between the need for accuracy on the one hand, and the need for readability on the other. I first decided on the amount of detail necessary for the analysis of naturally occurring conversations, depending on what I judged to be relevant. To capture the specific features of spoken BELF data, it was necessary to follow an established a set of symbols that has been developed specifically for ELF interactions. Therefore, I opted to transcribe the naturally occurring conversations following the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) mark-up conventions (see Appendix 1). Thus, it can be said that I followed a naturalized approach in which language represents the real world and reflects a verbatim

depiction of speech (Schegloff, 1997). Having said that, in line with Bucholtz (2000), I believe transcription is never 'neutral' and never 'complete' as there are always things that will not be shown in the transcript. The next section sheds light on my data analytic tools.

5.7 Data analysis

As discussed in section [5.5](#), ethnography is not only a method of data collection; it can also refer to the final product and analysis. Therefore, for the macro level analysis, the paradigm appropriate to fulfil the need for characterizations of language as a sociocultural practice is ethnography. Adopting an ethnographic perspective can provide a description of language users as they are situated in their CoP. However, in terms of linguistic research, a micro level analysis is needed to understand the fine grain of task-oriented interactions in the target CoP. Therefore, a discourse analytic approach was adopted to analyse the interactions recorded during business meetings. As for interview data and fieldnotes, thematic analysis seemed to be the most appropriate method to generate units of analysis from the participants' responses.

5.7.1 Discourse analysis

A holistic, ethnographic research approach to studying BELF highlights the need to support wider level characterizations of language with detailed microanalysis of language use. BELF has specific pragmatic characteristics (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of BELF pragmatics), and demonstrating these characteristics requires examples of the participants' naturally occurring language use. The most suitable means to achieve this goal is to use the tools offered by discourse analysis (DA). The hallmark of DA is that it recognizes variability and context, thus facilitating the combination of micro and macro (Baxter, 2010). Hall (2002) states that DA studies attempt to understand how sociocultural realities are constructed: whether through detailed analysis of particular language forms or larger cultural or institutional activities. This detailed investigation results in linguistic research that is empirically grounded on the examination of language and linguistic performance in naturally occurring settings.

In this study, through analysis of instances of BELF using DA tools, it may be possible to observe the way in which BELF speakers utilize their knowledge and skills of communication, as well as their understanding of the role of culture and possibly their intercultural awareness (cf. Baker, 2008) during their interactions. In this research, recording and analysing instances of interaction in BELF made available empirical data for examining the most prominent BELF characteristics discussed in Chapter 4. Through detailed examination of the discourse employing DA techniques, it was relatively possible to uncover the way understanding is co-constructed throughout the communicative event by the participants, while also gaining insights into interactants' strategic and discursive practices. Examples of what extensive DA can reveal include accommodation strategies such as code-switching, repetitions and paraphrasing, the existence/non-existence of repair, the cultural hybridity of BELF and the roles that different L1 discourse practices play in BELF communication, and how intercultural communication in BELF is managed, in addition to the characteristics of the participants' shared repertoire of multilingual recourses.

DA in ELF research has been used to present detailed investigations of discourse as evidence for wide debates regarding English in its lingua franca role. Many of these have been mentioned already in the literature review, including Baker (2009), House, (2003), Meierkord (2002), Pölzl (2005), Pölzl and Seidlhofer (2006). In BELF specific research, an example of studies that use DA techniques is the work of Pullin-Stark (2009; 2010). Common themes running through these studies of ELF/BELF discourse are the importance of accommodation, negotiation and flexibility in interactions, the construction of context-dependent meaning and multilingual references as emergent resources.

In my research, I followed the principles of interactional sociolinguistics (IS) (Gumperz, 1992; 1996; 2003) as a specific approach to DA. IS may help to provide an analysis that links detailed conversational features with establishing shared contexts of interpretation on the basis of culturally derived background knowledge. IS examines communication at the level of speech events and focuses on analysing discourse and context and the relationship between them as a means to understand culture and language. A main feature of IS is its focus on how background knowledge affects the inferences and interpretations interactants make throughout a

communicative event. As Gumperz (2003: 218) explains, IS aims 'to show how individuals... use talk to achieve their communicative goals in real-life situations, by concentrating on the meaning-making processes and the taken-for-granted, background assumptions that underlie the negotiation of interpretations'. This background knowledge is contained in schemata or references that influence the speakers' interpretation of a communicative event. These references are based on context specific or local background knowledge. This interest in background knowledge is combined with an analysis of how and what signalling devices or 'contextualization cues' are used to trigger the frames participants use. The presuppositions and contextualization cues participants invest in an interaction will be built on their communicative histories, and it cannot be assumed that these will be shared by speakers. Based on the above characterization of IS, it appears to be a useful tool for studying language use in a specific CoP (in this case, Deema Arabia as a Saudi MNC).

In ELF research, IS is less widespread than other discursive analytic approaches—namely, conversation analysis (CA). CA aims to analyse conversations turn-by-turn, and only the data in the interactions is considered relevant in the analysis, while the wider context is often overlooked (Baxter, 2010). Additionally, CA ignores the sociocultural phenomena contained in 'discourses' in the larger sense (Schiffrin, 1994). Major ELF studies have employed CA tools to provide microanalysis of their data. Some of them adopt CA as a sole method of data analysis (cf. Firth, 2009; Kaur, 2009). However, using CA solely has been criticized for being dry due to its mechanical nature as well as its disregard of the wider context of the analysed interactions (see Cogo and Dewey, 2012 for detailed criticism of total reliance on CA). Other ELF researchers, however, present a version of CA that does not adopt the sociocultural norms of ENL and which contains more ethnographic contextualization of the data (cf. Cogo and Dewey, 2012). Since the BELF features I examined in my research do not require detailed turn-by-turn analysis of talk in interaction, I did not find CA appropriate for my purposes. IS was more appropriate as I planned to look at speech events larger than individual turns.

5.7.2 Thematic analysis

I found thematic analysis to be the most appropriate method to analyse interview data in which participants express their language learning histories and attitudes toward using English in their daily business life, in addition to their intercultural communication experiences. Thematic analysis is the most common form of analysis in qualitative research. It emphasizes pinpointing, examining and recording themes within data, and aims at capturing the intricacies of meaning within a data set (Guest *et al.*, 2012; see also Boyatzis, 1998). Themes are patterns across data sets that are important to the description of a phenomenon (Guest *et al.*, 2012). BELF research has made extensive use of thematic analysis to analyse interview data. Examples include Ehrenreich (2009, 2010) in the study of BELF in German MNCs and Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) in the study of perceptions of internationally operating business professionals of their own and their partners' BELF communication. Some of Kankaanranta and Planken's emerging themes include the nature of BELF communication, NESs participation in BELF interactions and the importance of business domain knowledge. I also analysed fieldnotes thematically and synthesized them with the discursive analysis of language use discussed above, as well as with the thematic analysis of the interview data, as the next two chapters will reveal.

In the following chapters, I present extracts from my data to discuss my findings. Because I have different sets of data (i.e. interview data, recoded business meetings and fieldnotes), I attempt to present extracts from each data set in a visually distinct manner. Thus, data extracts from meetings are labelled as *Meeting extract*; data extracts from interviews are labelled as *Extract*; and finally, fieldnotes are labelled as *Fieldnote*. Meeting extracts are prefaced with contextual information on: a) participants, i.e. the speakers in the extract discussed, their L1s and their positions within the company; and b) setting, i.e. meeting topic, department and number of participants in the meeting. I also give brief background information on each meeting extract while discursively analysing BELF use in the extract.

5.8 Summary

This chapter explained my research methodology, which complies with the principles of ethnographic research. I started this chapter by presenting my research questions. I then

explained the guiding assumptions I followed during my data collection and analysis. Later, I outlined the details of the research context and its sociolinguistic reality and organizational culture. I then discussed ethnography as a research paradigm, paying special attention to the methodological significance of adopting an ethnographic perspective in my research. This was followed by a detailed account of the ethnographic methods I employed in my data collection. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of the analytical tools I used to generate my research findings.

Chapter 6 Code-Switching in Deema Arabia's Communities of Practice

6.1 Introduction

As discussed at length in Chapter 4, findings from ELF research continue to show that ELF is characterized by its heightened hybridity, as its users draw on their multilingual repertoires to ensure the efficiency of communication. In this sense, ELF users switch from one code to another with relative ease, relying on the shared background knowledge of their community of practice (CoP). In my data, switching codes is the most prevalent communicative strategy employed to achieve the communicative goals in the different recorded interactions. The participants switch mainly between English and Arabic, in addition to the different mother tongues present at different communicative events. It is noteworthy here that, following Romaine (2001) and Klimpfinger (2009), I approach the data with a more flexible consideration of types of code-switching, which can include word-fragments, single words, and clauses up to whole passages.

In this chapter, I start by presenting the shared repertoire of resources in Deema Arabia's CoPs while explaining the status of Arabic, English and other languages in these communities. I then discuss some of the influences of Arabic on BELF discourse practices as exhibited in my data. Finally, I examine how code-switching is part of the multilingual practices in Deema Arabia's CoPs. I start by presenting how some of my participants claim that switching codes is part of their everyday communication, which indicates that code-switching is a widespread practice in communication in their CoP. I then discuss the possible social motives that explain the strategic use of code-switching while presenting examples from participants' naturally occurring interactions. When possible, I supplement my analysis with the participants' commentary from the retrospective interviews as well as their input from the first set of ethnographic interviews.

6.2 The shared repertoire of resources in Deema Arabia's communities of practice

Like any typical MNC, the shared repertoire of resources used by Deema Arabia's staff includes both linguistic and non-linguistic resources. The non-linguistic resources include visual elements such as power point presentations, charts and illustrations. These resources aid participants in meaning-making processes, as seen in some extracts in this chapter and the following one (see also Ehrenreich, 2009). The linguistic resources include the different first and additional languages of Deema CoP members in addition to Arabic, the habitat language of the majority of the staff, and English, the business language. In what follows, I discuss the status of English, Arabic and other languages in Deema CoPs.

6.2.1 The status of English, Arabic and other languages in Deema Arabia's communities of practice

As discussed in Chapter 3, even MNCs that adopt English as an official corporate language cannot eliminate the use of other languages in the workplace (cf. Ehrenreich, 2010; Fredriksson *et al.*, 2006). Multilingualism is part and parcel of multinationals and is therefore the norm in companies that call themselves multinational. Gerritsen and Nickerson (2009) argue that globally operating business professionals all seem to need at least two languages to do their work: their mother tongue and English. In Deema Arabia, English does not have the official status of a corporate language. Unlike the corporates in which most BELF research took place (cf. Ehrenreich, 2009, 2010, 2011; Louhiala-Salminen *et al.*, 2005; Kankaanranta and Planken, 2010), there is no corporate policy that regulates the use of language in Deema Arabia. However, for the management of Deema Arabia, using English as a business language is the only option for managing an international workforce. Therefore, English is perceived as the official language by most of my participants. (This is further discussed in Chapter 8 on the participant's views of English as the business language of their workplace).

The linguascape in Deema Arabia is diverse, just like the backgrounds of its staff members discussed in section [5.3](#) above. Because some languages have more speakers than others, they can be described as part of the CoP's shared repertoire, even if it is not accessible to all of the CoP members and is only used by one of the CoP nationality-based subcommunities (see also

Smit, 2010). It is therefore common to hear a number of different identifiable languages spoken by members within the subcommunities, namely: Tagalog and Urdu. This is the case not only during informal encounters over lunch and coffee or in small talk but also during business interactions between members of the same subcommunity.

In order to determine the functional roles and statuses of both English and Arabic in Deema Arabia's CoPs, I asked my participants, during the interviews, to give their opinion as to what is the most spoken language in Deema Arabia. There are two clear trends in their answers: The Arabic-speaking participants assert that English is the number one language in Deema Arabia, whereas the non-Arabic speakers state that Arabic is the most spoken language in their CoP. Some of the participants speak extensively about their views. As a long-standing member of Deema Arabia's CoP, Ben (Filipino, IT services administrator) explains the shift in status of English from the primary to the secondary language and the subsequent ascendancy over the past ten years of Arabic as the primary language:

Extract 6.1

[B]ecause now they hire more and more Saudis you know so yeah they speak Arabic more I mean it's their language (.) and the and then aah all the Arabs I mean Egyptians and Lebanese start to speak Arabic more too you know but not because their English language is bad like the Saudis no because now with more Saudis they can speak their mother language (.) I mean aah now with MORE Saudis all Arabs speak Arabic now because they can and and they feel relax when they speak their mother language yeah I think

Ben attributes this shift in the status of English to the abovementioned practice of Saudization of staff members in Deema Arabia and other Saudi MNCs (see [5.3](#) on research context for more information on Saudization). He further explains that Saudis are less competent speakers of English and that therefore they speak Arabic unless they find themselves in a situation in which the only possible option for successful communication is English. Ben explains that the presence of the Saudi majority which speaks Arabic encourages other Arabic speakers to use Arabic more often in their workplace because it has become an accepted behaviour in their CoP. Ben's statement about the widespread use of Arabic in Deema Arabia is compatible with my own observations and fieldnotes. Arabic is the most prevalent spoken language in the company. This

fact led the HR executive manager to recommend that I be placed in the IT department to conduct my fieldwork on BELF use. IT is the department with the fewest Arabic-speaking staff members, a fact that, to some extent, guaranteed that I get the type of data that serves my research aims.

At the informal level, staff members at Deema Arabia form friendships based on certain factors, the most important of which appear to be nationality/language-based friendships. This is very evident during the lunch hours which most of the employees spend at the company's restaurant. The L1/national groups have their breaks together. They come from different functional departments as well as different organizational levels; yet, they are keen on spending time together. For example, Will explains to me why relationships at Deema Arabia follow this pattern:

Extract 6.2

[W]e are like family here and and friends. It's a kind of oh to be alone in a foreign country so that's a kind of get us together more (.) we organize dinners and and parties and going to places and that makes us closer and that becomes like family (.) because their real families are are in other country

Mamat, a Filipino janitor in the IT Services Department, expresses a view similar to Will's and describes what Smit (2010: 122) calls 'subcommunities' as 'little groups':

Extract 6.3

[B]ecause we [the Filipinos] big group and and it's also easier to uhm: join people from your country or people you feel close to you (.) we made little groups you know @@@

Haidar, who is one of the three Malayalam speakers in Deema Arabia, says he only has one true friend in Jeddah, and this friend happens to be one of the two other Malayalam speakers. He describes how he met this 'true friend' through another colleague who did what Haider describes as 'matchmaking':

Extract 6.4

Wesam told me that he:: met an Indian from Kerala and he asked him where he works and aah I went to his desk and we became friends immediately (2) I agree language plays roles but also because we are from Kerala we are all similar ALmost similar so it is easier to befriend someone similar to you right?

This finding resonates to some extent with Smit's (2010) findings. In the classroom CoP, Smit finds that the students initially make friends with the L1 speakers of the same language. Further, L1-based friendships lead to the creation of L1-based 'subcommunities', with very little cross-talk across the different subgroups (ibid.: 125-126). In Deema Arabia, cross-talk amongst different subcommunities seems to be work-related, but includes relational or small talk as well.

Although my participants claim that they are cautious in terms of speaking their L1s in the presence of colleagues who do not speak them, i.e. they report that they actively practice linguistic respect (see Ehrenreich, 2009) toward their colleagues, my observations show that this is not the case in most of the L1 encounters I observed (see Fieldnote 1 in this chapter). This is commonplace amongst different L1 subcommunities and seems to be accepted by the CoP members. The use of code-switching as an including/excluding strategy in the recorded interactions substantiates my observations (see section [6.3.6](#) below).

As for written communication, internal email and intranet communication is solely in English as required by the management. This indicates that English has a de facto official status as a corporate language, at least for emails. Additionally, written communication with other MNCs is also in English, but this is usually edited by some of the more proficient English speakers from the customer services team. Deema Arabia's website has both Arabic and English versions, but the Arabic version is what initially opens. The content of the English version of the website was composed in collaboration with the mother company in London and under its supervision, but it was edited and checked by a member of Deema Arabia for localization purposes as was explained to me by the HR executive manager. Thus, it can be said that emails to corporate clients and the company's website are handled exo-normatively in Deema Arabia, i.e. with reference to ENL norms. This is because of the effect these forms of communication have on the company's public image. This finding seems to be compatible with research done on BELF in other contexts (e.g. Ehrenreich, 2009, 2011). Finally, written communication with the government bodies is solely in Arabic, as the Saudi government strictly prohibits the use of any language other than Arabic in its correspondence.

As for oral communication, it can be said that endo-normativity, i.e. relying on local internal standards of language use (Ammon, 1989), is the general rule in most of Deema Arabia's BELF interactions. Thus, following Ehrenreich's (2011, 2015) application of Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model, I can place BELF use in Deema Arabia in the third phase, in which an endo-normative orientation dominates BELF communication. In this phase, which Schneider (ibid.: 40) calls 'Nativization', the CoP members identify themselves as part of a multinational organization and they develop into competent users of BELF, whose target is communicative effectiveness. This becomes clearer in the discussion of the participants' views of English in their workplace as a business reality which will be discussed in detail in section [8.2](#) below. This endo-normativity is also clearly seen in the way BELF use is infused with elements from Arabic and other languages in Deema CoPs, which is the focus of the next section.

6.2.2 The effects of Arabic on BELF discourse in Deema Arabia's communities of practice

The discussion of the linguistic landscape in Saudi Arabia presents an account of the main languages spoken in Deema CoPs. These languages constitute the CoPs' shared repertoire of linguistic resources. The main languages are: Arabic, the language of 'the habitat' (Pözl and Seidlhofer, 2006) of the majority of the participants, English, the perceived corporate language and the different L1s and additional languages spoken by the CoP members. The existence of this multitude of languages makes it an ideal context to study ELF/BELF interactions according to the definition of Cogo and Dewey (2012, see section [2.6](#) for relevant discussion). It also indicates that Deema Arabia presents what Ehrenreich (2011: 17) calls the 'language contact situation', which, as explained in section [5.3](#) on research context, makes it a suitable environment to study BELF use.

This multilingual/multicultural makeup shapes patterns of BELF interactions. In such linguistic environments, variability, one of ELF's principal characteristics, is heightened and cultural hybridity is even more expected. With this in mind, I echo Klimpfinger's (2009: 348) concern that so far 'little has been said about the use and role of other languages in ELF'. I find it especially

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surprising that, with the exception of Pölzl and Seidlhofer (2006), the role of the language of the habitat is often ignored in ELF research. Considering the claimed influence of Arabic on its speakers, including its speakers in Deema Arabia's CoPs, the habitat factor is essentially important. Taking Hitti's (2002: 90) often cited suggestion that 'hardly any language seems capable of exercising over the minds of its users such irresistible influence as Arabic', the role of Arabic in BELF use needs to be discussed further in order to grasp BELF's cultural hybridity.

The effect of Arabic on BELF use is also reflected in some of the discourse practices originating from Arabic, the mother tongue of the majority of the CoP members (see section [4.3](#) for relevant discussion). This effect is seen in the adoption of Saudi norms in relational talk, politeness strategies, turn-taking and other face-related issues. This feature is revealed in the discursive analysis of the recorded meeting language in the form of greetings and turn-taking management. It is also a prevalent observation in my field notes and comes up in the interview data as well. Ten of my non-Saudi participants assert that they happily adopt the local small talk norms. Jaafar (Indian, claims examiner), for example, claims that showing interest in a colleague's life through small talk has a positive influence in terms of cooperation in business related matters. Therefore, I argue that my data presents contrary evidence to some of the findings of business intercultural communication research, which often conclude that using relational language is challenging to participants in business intercultural communication settings (cf. Spencer-Oatey (2000) and section [4.3](#) of this study for relevant discussion).

Another cultural feature related to the habitat culture and adopted by Deema CoP members is using swear words and taboo words, which are sometimes translated into English or used in their original Arabic form. In fact, translation of culture-specific elements from Arabic, and sometimes from other mother tongues, to English is a common practice in Deema CoPs. Two of my participants assert that they translate proverbs, poetry and idioms from their L1s. One of them, Omar, says that a proverb he once shared with his Saudi manager is now known to all of his department members because his manager found it useful and started using it often. Thus, it can be said that BELF users in Deema Arabia make use of idiomatic expressions by presenting and sharing idiomatic phrases from their L1s for their own locally emerging needs and purposes.

BELF in this case serves as a shared communicative resource used to accommodate one another's needs, and to mark shared territory in emerging communities of practice. According to Seidlhofer (2009) however, the co-construction of idiomatic phrases in ELF talk goes even further: over and above signalling co-operation, it also serves to create shared active spaces as in the case of the example given by Omar. This fact diminishes the validity of any debate regarding the use of BELF as a tool used strictly for communication and not for identification (See section [3.3.5.1](#) for relevant discussion).

Findings from this research are in line with those of Meierkord (2002), Pitzl (2009) and Firth (2009). Firth (2009) asserts that ELF is inherently hybrid in nature. For example, participants may borrow, use and reuse each other's language forms, create nuance words and switch and mix languages. This happens especially when they are unable to rely on a 'pre-constituted form' (ibid.: 9) for meaning; they operate complex pragmatic strategies to help them negotiate their variable forms. Based on the different data sets, it is clear that elements of Arabic have become an integral part of BELF communication in Deema Arabia. One clear reflection of this fact is evident in Deema Arabia members' extensive, undisruptive use of code-switching. This characteristic alternation between Arabic and English is examined throughout the rest of this chapter. In the next section, I discuss the use of code-switching as the most important communicative strategy that contributes to the co-construction of meaning in Deema Arabia.

6.3 Code-switching in Deema Arabia

The various data sets in this research strongly suggest that code-switching is one of the most characteristic and extensively used communicative strategies in Deema Arabia. Because of its direct relation to CoP members' multilingual repertoire, I discuss it in this chapter to illustrate how participants exploit their multilingual resources skilfully and strategically. I start by presenting the participants' views on their own use of code-switching. Subsequently, I illustrate the effect of NESs on code choice in meetings. Later, I discuss the most prevalent communicative functions that code-switching serves in BELF in Deema Arabia CoPs, while presenting some extracts from the recorded meetings to illustrate each function.

6.3.1 The participants' views of code-switching in Saudi multinational companies

As explained earlier, Deema Arabia is characterized by a general sense of linguistic respect amongst staff members; when the interaction involves speakers from different linguacultural backgrounds, the language chosen for the interaction is routinely English. This principle governs communication between different staff members (see also Ehrenreich, 2009). However, this does not indicate that communication in English does not include Arabic elements and elements from other languages as well. Based on the recordings, my observations and most of the participants' views, switching between Arabic and English is the unmarked norm of communication in Deema Arabia's CoP. Most of my participants could neither comment upon nor provide justifications for their multilingual practices in the retrospective interviews. For most of them, this multilingual expression is simply how they unconsciously and effortlessly communicate everyday. During the individual ethnographic interviews, I set out to elicit my participants' explanations of why they code-switch, and in what follows, I present some of their answers.

Ibtehal explains that she is not aware of why she code-switches, as she does not think about her code-switching practices:

Extract 6.5

I don't know I mean I know hmm this is what we do all of us <L1 Ar> *wallah* {I swear by Allah} I don't think about it @@

Majed also explains that code-switching is now the norm in Saudi Arabia not only in business settings but also in most aspects of life:

Extract 6.6

[T]his is how I talk this is how EVERYone talk (.) English words are aah part of the Arabic language now it is hard to aah <L1 Ar> *inno* {that} to draw <L1 Ar> *zay* {like} clear line and say this situation is ONLY English or this situation is ONLY Arabic (.) well only if you are talking to:: very old people and of course in religious stuff and and prayers

Majed's statement resonates with some sociolinguists' views that reject code separation, stress the fluidity of language and promote a monolectal approach to multilingual practices (e.g. Michael-Luna and Canagarajah's (2008) code meshing). However, Majed names a few situations in which a clear line between languages can be drawn, which in part lends support to Gumperz's (1982) argument for situational code-switching (see section [4.4.1](#) for relevant discussion).

Bakor also highlights the complexity of code choice in Deema Arabia CoPs and is aware of the need for more than one code in meetings, especially in what he calls 'side discussions', that is, when some of the meeting participants engage in a conversation among themselves while the meeting is still in progress.

Extract 6.7

[A]fter all we have so many nationalities here (.) yes so the use of languages it is not always straightforward (2) like in a meeting we can very easily move from one language to another like like in: side discussions.

Bakor's description of code-switching use exemplifies in part Auer's (1998: 8) 'discourse-related' function of code-switching, in which no clear social meaning or symbol is assigned to the use of code-switching other than to flag a side comment from the main topic. Tariq, on the other hand, expresses his understanding of my research interest while insisting that mixing codes is not complicated. He comments in Arabic:

Extract 6.8

I know you are trying to find a theory or establish a theory or prove a theory here but the way we use language is simple it is a little bit of both English and Arabic and and (.) it works @@@ (*my translation*)

These views of code-switching as the norm in the community concurs with Woolard's (2004) finding that the use of code-switching is not always deliberate, or even conscious choice. This assertion also appears to be in line with theories that warn against any conceptualizations of code-switching that denote intentionality and prior planning (e.g. Stroud, 1992). However, as Gumperz himself (1984: 110) asserts, 'metaphorical code-switching occurs below the level of

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consciousness' (see section [4.4.1](#)). Therefore, Tariq's statement cannot be taken on face value without further analysis of interactional data to account for the role code-switching plays in BELF talk in Deema Arabia, which I examine in later sections of this chapter.

6.3.2 Native English speakers' effect on code-switching

Having explained some of the participants' views on code-switching, it is worth mentioning that their code choice is not as straightforward as they claim. From my observations, there are a number of factors that can contribute to the type of discourse employed in a meeting and that can allow or limit the mixing of codes. As explained earlier (see section [5.3.1](#)), meetings in Deema Arabia can be characterized on the basis of the presence of senior staff members at high-stakes meetings versus peer meetings or departmental meetings. High-stakes meetings are very formal, not only because of the seniority of some of the participants but also because very often they are conducted in order to deal with problematic situations. Code choice for such meetings seems somewhat straightforward. With the exception of some religious phrases, English is the language used throughout high-stakes meetings and the only switches to Arabic are during conference calls, to ensure the accuracy of the message and overcome technical problems. This choice can be further justified by the presence of native speakers of English in some of these meetings. This change in linguistic behaviour can be seen as a sign that the meeting participants perceive NESs as monolingual and feel that code-switching can be unsettling for them. However, it can also indicate that BELF users in Deema Arabia believe that the NESs have ownership over their language and that, in their presence, English should be spoken according to their standards. This situation holds true even when the meeting has thirty participants, only one of whom is a British NES. Although this is my observation and it does not come up during the individual interviews, when I bring this up during the retrospective interviews, most of my participants seem aware of this shift in their linguistic behaviour. However, they attribute this shift to the fact that NESs in the company hold senior positions and therefore need to be accommodated. Interestingly, the seniority of a staff member does not have this effect on the type of discourse if the senior staff member present is Indian or Filipino, which indicates that NESs' participation in some staff meetings can play a major role in the participants' code choice. To demonstrate this point further,

I present two extracts from two monologues by the same person: the first one takes place in the HR quarterly meeting in which the participants have different linguacultural backgrounds, none of which is NES; and the second one takes place in the quarterly executive review meeting in which there are three NES participants. The two events are only one day apart and the speaker is talking about the same topic, i.e. his units' achievements during the quarter.

Meeting extract 6.1

Participants: Anwar L1 Arabic (Financial assistant admin)

Setting: Executive quarterly meeting, 18 participants: 11 Arabic speakers, 7 non-Arabic speakers (3 NESs)

- 1 We:: invested in attracting opportunities to the normal ups and downs of the the
- 2 business cycles (.) projects our projects are evaluated under a wide range of
- 3 different business and and economic conditions and we hmmm expect them to to
- 4 deLIVER competitive returns through aspects of the business cycle 2013 has been a
- 5 record year for capital spending thus far

Meeting extract 6.2

Participants: Anwar L1 Arabic (Financial assistant admin)

Setting: HR quarterly meeting, 21 participants: 12 Arabic speakers, 9 non-Arabic speakers (no NESs)

- 1 Anwar: <L1 Ar> *al* {the} returns <L1 Ar> *elli elli* {that that} expected through the
- 2 business cycle of our investments are expected to be competitive <L1 Ar> *inshallah*
- 3 {God willing}

This shift in Anwar's linguistic behaviour is telling. The speaker is a Jordanian (L1: Arabic) financial analyst. He is also the unofficial spokesperson of the Department of Accounting and Finance, because his manager delegates public speaking to him (according to some of my participants in the retrospective interviews). In both meetings, there are staff members senior to him in the company's hierarchy, and in both meetings there are a significant number of non-Arabic speakers. In Meeting extract 6.1, the speaker uses English without switching to Arabic at

any time. In Meeting extract 6.2, however, he switches to Arabic at different linguistic levels, from word-fragments to whole clusters. Considering that the two meetings have almost the same settings except for the presence of NESs, I argue that this presence is the motive that justifies the linguistic shift in the speaker's behaviour. It is noteworthy that the above example is not exceptional in any way, as I observed similar behaviour from various individuals. This assertion can be further demonstrated by looking at Table 4 below, which shows the number of code-switches and the number of NES participants in each of the recorded meetings. This finding signifies the uniqueness of the Saudi context in BELF research because many research findings point toward the declining effect of NES in ELF settings (cf. Jenkins, 2007). It contradicts Jenkins's (2007) argument that 'the current situation in the expanding circle is potentially rather different from typical situations in which powerful NS groups impose their linguistic norms on less powerful, often minority, NNSs groups' (p. 198). This observation leads me to place Deema Arabia communication in the presence of NESs in the second phase of Ehrenreich's (2010) application of Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model rather than in the third phase as stated in section [6.2](#). In this phase (second phase) an exo-normative orientation is implemented and 'power stratification is defined in terms of business hierarchies, however, to some extent also in terms of proficiency in English' (Ehrenreich, 2011: 30). Ehrenreich argues that NESs are perceived as either intimidating or as part of the international mix, based on their functions and group sizes. In the case of Deema Arabia, NESs (i.e. those coming from Kachru's Inner Circle countries) constitute a minority, but a minority that mostly holds high places in the company's hierarchy. This indicates that NESs' effect on the code choice can be twofold, i.e. based on both the positions they hold within the company and their status as native speakers of English. It can be argued that BELF users in Deema Arabia are accommodating NESs by deferring to NES norms, at least by avoiding code-switching. This observation corroborates previous ELF research findings that NNEs are aware of NESs relative lack of the communicative skills needed for the success of ELF communicative events in addition to their awareness of the special efforts ELF communication requires (cf. Kaur, 2011; Mauranen, 2012). Table 4 below, which shows the number of code-switches and the number of NES participants in each of the recorded meetings, presents evidence that lends support to this argument. The number of code-switches in the meetings in which NESs participate (e.g. the Executive quarterly meeting) is significantly less than the number of switches in meetings in which no NESs are present (e.g. the HR quarterly meeting) as illustrated in Table 4.

As for the rest of the meetings I observed and recorded (departmental and peer meetings), code-switching is one of norms of communication. It is extensively employed to achieve different communicative functions and signal varied social purposes. In the next section, I explain the potential social motivation for code-switching in my BELF data.

Table 4 Instances of code-switching in Deema Arabia meetings

Meeting title	Length (minutes)	Number of code-switches	Number of NES participants
Executive quarterly meeting	175	16	3
HR quarterly meeting	235	167	0
Urgent problem-solving cross-departmental (IT+ HR) meeting	95	73	0
Facilities unit problem solving meeting	60	64	0
Pre-Eid break closing meeting of the Corporate Services Department	65	66	0
IT Ramadan working hours allocation	75	16	0
IT leading team with executive board to discuss a proposal	55	9	2
The Services Department's quarterly meeting	80	21	1

6.3.3 Communicative functions of code-switching in Saudi BELF

As discussed in Chapter Four, sociolinguistic research discusses the phenomenon of code-switching extensively, demonstrating that code switches can be motivated by different sociolinguistic factors to serve different communicative functions (cf. Gumperz, 1982; Romaine, 2000). Although, as explained in section [4.4.1](#), these views are criticized, a better alternative explanation of the use of code-switching is not yet available. After extensive coding of my recorded data, it is apparent that code-switching serves a range of functions in BELF, and these functions are in accordance with what is reported in the sociolinguistic literature on code-switching in multilingual contexts. In order to determine the function(s) it fulfils, I examined the effect of each code-switching instance on the subsequent turns, considering this in relation to the context of the

communicative event in which it was used. In what follows, I present how these functions are revealed in the data and how the participants comment on their own use of code-switching. Clearly, in each of the extracts presented below, the speakers' level of proficiency is not a determining factor in the switch from one code to another. Therefore, code-switching in Deema Arabia CoPs cannot be regarded as a 'compensation strategy', as it is described in mainstream SLA research.

I can categorize the functions of code-switching here as the following: accommodation (e.g. Cogo, 2007, 2009), code-switching for emphasis (e.g. Romaine, 2001) switching to appeal for assistance (e.g. Klimpfinger, 2009), emblematic switching, cultural code-switching such as religion-related terms and greetings (Pölzl, 2005; Pölzl and Seidlhofer, 2006), code-switching as an including and excluding strategy (e.g. Cogo, 2012), and finally, code-switching to build rapport and show solidarity. However, these categories are not in any way mutually exclusive because one switch can be motivated by different communicative needs and serve more than one function. Nevertheless, some instances of code-switching in my data seem to serve a specific function and have an effect on the later turns which enable this categorization. Table 5 shows the number of instances of each function of code-switching as manifested in my data. Naturally, this list does not represent all the instances of the code-switching I encounter in my recorded data; it only demonstrates the frequencies of the most prevalent functions of code-switching. Other types of code-switching are encountered, but they are less prevalent than the ones I discuss in this chapter and cannot be discussed here due to space limits. These types include: code-switching for repair and code-switching for humorous effects.

Table 5 Functions of code-switching in Deema Arabia

Code-switching function	Number of instances
Accommodative code-switching	23
Code-switching for emphasis	54
Code-switching to appeal for assistance	22
Emblematic code-switching	105
Code-switching to include/exclude	31
Code-switching to signal cultural background	148
Code-switching to build rapport	24

6.3.3.1 Code-switching as an accommodative strategy

ELF researchers argue that code-switching can serve as an accommodative tool to construct and negotiate meaning (cf. Cogo, 2009). Jenkins (2011: 931) argues that, through accommodation, 'speakers prioritize communicative effectiveness over narrow predetermined notions of correctness'. In my data, the participants switch between English and Arabic to accommodate their interlocutors, to ensure mutual understanding and to add emphasis to the content of the interactions. This accommodation is evident in the naturally occurring meeting interactions as well as in the participants' explanations of their multilingual practices. Saleh, for example, tries hard to speak English as much as possible out of respect to his non-Arabic speaking colleagues, but he explains that sometimes there is an urgent need to accommodate the less proficient speakers.

Extract 6.9

[H]owever aah if I want to emphasize something important for people who are not good in English I'm gonna explain it twice in Arabic and in English

Similarly, Wesam asserts that his code choice is based on the person he is talking to. He justifies his partial or total shift to Arabic on the basis of his interlocutor's needs. He says:

Extract 6.10

I speak English more or less [...] once I notice he [his interlocutor] is puzzled and confused and not understanding me I automatically shift to Arabic Arabic totally (.) or just a little bit sometimes

Saleh and Wesam's views of accommodative code-switching are in accordance with the findings of ELF researchers. In ELF literature, code-switching is regarded as a positive linguistic characteristic, a collaborative tool to construct understanding. For participants like the above, accommodating their interlocutors is not seen as a source of frustration, since they view it as necessary to achieve their communicative goals. This positive view of accommodative code-switching, however, is not always the case. For instance, Mazin explains his view on switching to Arabic in meetings in a very pragmatic manner. He highlights the need for efficiency and effectiveness in business communication and explains how switching can sometimes save a great amount of time otherwise spent in negotiating meaning in English; one can be more efficient by using Arabic when it is another linguistic resource available to the interlocutors. Mazin says:

Extract 6.11

I speak English well <L1 Ar> *alhamdulillah* {thanks to Allah} so yeah nothing to prove when I speak English all the way [...] it's a waste of time when you try to explain the same point over and over and over again when you can just say it in Arabic and be over with it

He then continues in Arabic with a strong tone:

Extract 6.12

Sometimes this disturbs people who want me to be patient with them so that they can learn the language but my brother this is workplace not an English institute (.) if you want to learn English go and sign up for a course Allah makes it easy for you (prayer) but this is a workplace and we have to achieve (*my translation*)

Mazin's views on code-switching are compatible with the findings of BELF research that show business comes first, whereas language matters are subordinate to them (Ehrenreich, 2009, 2010; Louhiala-Slminen *et al.*, 2005). He stresses the need for achieving and for being understood over the 'one language rule' that is assumed to be the policy in Deema Arabia. Therefore, even though his attitude seems negative to some of his colleagues and to me as an ELF researcher, his to-the-point explanation of accommodative code-switching seems valid. In ELF research, there is a tendency to describe the role of co-operation between ELF speakers in a rather positive sense; speakers display awareness of their interlocutors' lack of proficiency and thus show support by accommodating their English to suit their interlocutors' needs. However, the above extract suggests that accommodation practices are used to ensure understanding in order to get a job done, rather than to display cooperation and understanding of the interlocutors' needs, even if these practices lead to face-related issues.

Upon examining the above views of accommodative code-switching, it can be said that switching codes to achieve mutual understanding is practiced in problematic situations in which one of the language users is perceived to lack the proficiency to participate effectively in ELF interactions. However, based on the data from my field notes and the recorded meetings, I can describe the instances of accommodative code-switching as a tool to increase the explicitness of the content

and to ensure understanding, rather than a means to solve a communication problem as the above participants explain, negatively or positively. This is further evidenced in the extracts below:

Meeting extract 6.3

Participants: Abdullah (Facilities Manager) L1: Arabic.

Setting: problem-solving Facilities Unit meeting, 6 participants: 4 non-Arabic speakers and 2 Arabic speakers

- 1 Abdullah: we are working <L1 Ar> *alaan* {now} on a proposal that will extend the
2 date for certification by 2 years. It will also extend and and amend aaah <L1 Ar>
3 *ye'adel* {amend} the existing requirement for for the:: employing corporates to
4 ensu:re <L1 Ar> *inno al* {that the} CR operators are <L1 Ar> *mo'ahleen* {qualified}
5 and and competent to operate safely

This meeting is chaired by Abdullah to target an issue that came up and needed to be dealt with immediately. Abdullah is giving closing remarks and talking about what he is doing to prevent this problem in the future. It can be seen that Abdullah switches to Arabic in every utterance. The most interesting switch is in line 3, where he switches to Arabic to translate a word he says in English, 'amend', which he seems to assume may not be understood by some of his interlocutors. He thus provides the equivalent in Arabic, *ye'adel*, to ensure understanding. He does this again in the next line when he says *mo'ahleen*, which means 'qualified' and then follows with a word having similar meaning in English, 'competent', to ensure that his non-Arabic speaking interlocutors understand as well. All of the meeting participants seem to understand what Abdullah is trying to communicate and the accommodative code-switching in this instance is not triggered by a problematic exchange but is rather employed as a pre-emptive strategy to avoid understanding problems and to increase explicitness, as is further seen in the next extract. Increasing explicitness to enhance understanding in ELF through different strategies, including code-switching, is one of the properties of ELF interactions that is well-documented (cf. Cogo and Dewey, 2012; Kalocsai, 2014; Mauranen, 2012).

Meeting extract 6.4

Participants: Fahad: (Corporate services department manager) L1: Arabic

Setting: pre-Eid break closing meeting of the corporate services department, 35 participants: 14 Arabic speakers, 21 non-Arabic speakers

1 Fahad: Aah <L1 Ar> *al* {the} claims yeah the claims issue we are coming back to in
 2 round about five minutes because I want to concentrate on <L1 Ar> *alekhla'a altebbi* {the
 3 emergency evacuation} now let's wrap up <L1 Ar> *alekhla'a altebbi aw al al* {the
 4 emergency evacuation or the the} emergency evacuation thing and later come to to a
 5 couple of peripheral points.

In the above extract, Fahad, the chair of the meeting, is asked to discuss some problematic unprocessed claims, but he thinks there is a more urgent issue to discuss, which is their recently launched emergency evacuation, *alekhla'a altebbi*, service. Because this service is new to the company, and because of the diversity of the work specialties and expertise of the meeting attendees, it seems that Fahad uses the Arabic term to accommodate the need of the Arabic speakers and to ensure that they understand the new term he is introducing. He then repeats the term in Arabic, followed by its English equivalent to include the rest of the meeting attendees. The fact that Fahad presents the term in Arabic first indicates his desire to avoid a potential misunderstanding of the new term. As in Meeting extract 6.3, the above extract demonstrates the speaker's awareness of his interlocutors' background knowledge, which influences the code choice for that particular moment. It also demonstrates the process by which a new item is added to the CoP's shared repertoire. As emergency evacuation will be a service that Deema Arabia provides, it is necessary that staff members be aware of it. Therefore, integral to the introduction of the new service to the staff members is the introduction of the term in both English and Arabic. Through mutual engagement, this term becomes part of the CoP's shared repertoire.

Accommodative code-switching serves as a pre-emptive strategy to avoid potential misunderstandings, especially when using less common lexical items, including specialized terminology that speakers, based on their CoP experiences, may find problematic. In the next section, I explain how code-switching can be used strategically to add emphasis.

6.3.3.2 Code-switching for emphasis

Another reason for code-switching in my data is for adding emphasis. It can be said that in my BELF data, code-switching for emphasis complements accommodative code-switching in being listener-oriented. Quite often, BELF users in Deema Arabia switch to Arabic not to accommodate per se, but to emphasize a point and to ensure understanding, as Saleh explains above: ‘if I want to emphasize something important’. The examples that illustrate this strategic use of code-switching are innumerable in the data. To demonstrate, I present the extract below:

Meeting extract 6.5

Participants: Naser L1 Arabic (HR Assistant manager); Hanif L1 Urdu (HR assistant admin)

Setting: HR quarterly meeting, 21 participants: 12 Arabic speakers, 9 non-Arabic speakers

- 1 Naser: if an employee receives an appraisal that doesn't have <L1 Ar> LA {neither}
- 2 strength <L1 Ar> WALA {nor} weaknesses <L1 Ar> WALA {nor} areas to develop what
- 3 what=
- 4 Hanif: =what's the value of the appraisal
- 5 Naser: EXACTLY

In the above extract, the chair of the meeting is discussing the importance of providing employees with thorough and constructive appraisal forms. He switches to Arabic, apparently to emphasize the point he is making, by using the Arabic, instead of the English determiners. Switching determiners, as opposed to content words, diminishes the possibility of accommodative switching, as lack of knowledge of determiners is unlikely to raise an understanding problem. The desire for emphasis becomes clearer from the prosodic prominence added (through added stress) to the Arabic elements in the speech (see also Pickering, 2009). It is important to note that this participant is a very fluent English speaker as well as a major motivational speaker and trainer not only in the company I study but also across Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that he is someone who lacks either the confidence or the proficiency to say the whole utterance in English. Instead, he switches to Arabic to get his listeners' full attention and stress the issue he is highlighting. The other interesting observation in this extract is the importance of background knowledge in the interpretation of an

utterance. It can be seen that Hanif, although he does not identify himself as an Arabic speaker, understands Naser's utterance and even shows his understanding by completing Naser's utterance with an appropriate conclusion. Naser then confirms Hanif's understanding of the utterance by ending the interaction with the emphasised word 'EXACTLY'.

Code-switching for emphasis is often combined with the prosodic prominence of the utterance, as seen in the example above and in the next extract. In the previous extract, switching occurs through determiners, which may have less effect on the comprehension of the sentence, especially given the added prominence, hand gestures and linguistic context in which it is embedded. This is the case in most of the instances in which code-switching for emphasis occurs. However, in some cases, switching to Arabic for emphasis can be through words with more semantic weight as in the extract below:

Meeting extract 6.6

Participants: Talal L1 Arabic (Executive manager/CEO brother); Najeeb L1 Urdu (Talal's office manager)

Setting: Services departments' quarterly meeting 38 participants: 19 Arabic speakers, 19 non Arabic speakers

- 1 Talal: <L1 Ar> *AIMODhesh inno* {the amazing (thing is) that} EVEN THOUGH the
- 2 number of backover incidents grew up last last months=
- 3 Najeeb: =Yeah it went up significantly=
- 4 Talal: =Interestingly and and reMARKably though the number of of BOF went down

In this extract, Talal, the executive manager who oversees all the operations in the company, is addressing the staff of three different service departments. He attended this meeting with his office manager, Najeeb, whom he describes in the same meeting as his 'right hand'. Talal compliments the teams on their performances in the preceding quarter and then gives an overview of the company's overall performance in the same period. In line 1, Talal switches to Arabic to express his amazement at the contradictory results he is presenting with the aid of charts on the screen. He uses the word *almodhesh* in Arabic while stressing the first two syllables to add emphasis to his statement. It is

important to note here that *almodhesh* is a Standard Arabic word that is not commonly used in spoken Saudi Arabic. This indicates that the code-switching here is twofold and involves switching in language and in register to stress the intended meaning. In the next turn, Najeeb interrupts to rephrase the piece of information Talal announces in what looks like an example of other-repair (this is examined in section [7.2.1](#)). Talal then continues using two English words, ‘interestingly’ and ‘remarkably’, as equivalents of the Arabic word *almodhesh* to communicate the same notion of surprise regarding the results presented. Employing two English words to express the connotative meaning of *almodhesh* signifies the importance of this switch to convey the precise meaning he aims to achieve, although the switch was only accessible to his Arabic interlocutors.

Code-switching for emphasis is one of the most prevalent functions for switching, which is best explained in light of the reported need for accuracy and effectiveness in BELF CoPs. In this sense, code-switching offers an extra resource in communication that is at the disposal of BELF users and allows for enhancing meaning and adding greater nuances of expression (Cogo, 2009). The instances in my data that can be categorized as switching for emphasis are numerous; most of them take forms similar to the two extracts above. In the next section, I discuss the use of code-switching as an including/excluding strategy.

6.3.3.3 Code-switching as an including/excluding strategy

One of the strategic uses of code-switching in my data is to specify a certain addressee, which, as explained in Chapter Four, is one of the most prevalent motives for code-switching (cf. Cogo, 2012; Heller, 1992; Klimpfinger, 2009). In this sense, switching codes can be purposefully used to include certain participants and exclude others based on the code in use, as seen in the following extract:

Meeting extract 6.7

Participants: Mazin L1 Arabic (Employee relations manager); Russel L1 Tagalog (HR admin assistant); Mohyee L1s Arabic+ French (facilities admin assistant).

Setting: Urgent problem solving HR meeting, 12 participants: 8 Arabic speakers and 4 non-Arabic speakers

- 1 Mazin: {looking at his laptop} another important thing for you for for US all to remember
2 about is is <L1 Ar> *alshakawi ya jama'a* {the complaints, guys}.
3 (2)
4 Russel: the complaints?
5 Mohyee: <nods> yeah the complaints
6 Mazin: yeah the complaints coming all the times from Jazan guys especially

In the above extract, Mazin switches to Arabic to introduce the problem of the constant complaints coming from the company's branch in Jazan. The code switch in this instance is clearly not an appeal for assistance. And yet, Russel, one of the non-Arabic speakers, volunteers and offers the equivalent in English. Based on his rising intonation, he is clearly unsure that 'complaints' is the right word. This uncertainty is addressed when Mohyee confirms Russel's interpretation of Mazin's utterance. Mazin then repeats Mohyee's utterance and uses the English word again when he notices that the other participants need to be involved. When I ask Mazin during the retrospective interview to comment on this episode, he claims that, since it is a sensitive topic, he does not want to address the whole group and blame them for the matter he wants to discuss. He knows the three individuals he needs to address, but does not want to single them out either. So the decision to switch to Arabic in this instance can be described as a strategic one, both for communicative efficiency and the exclusion of certain interlocutors. It is important to note that the rest of the meeting has switches with long passages and extended exchanges in Arabic (one of the Arabic stretches lasted for about 7 minutes). As a result, two of the non-Arabic speakers excuse themselves and leave the meeting, which, I assume, no longer concerns them beyond that point.

Another form of code-switching as an including/excluding strategy is evident in meetings and in various everyday interactions. This form involves non-Arabic speakers who start a conversation in their mother tongues as an indication that they only want to include speakers of that specific language in their interaction. In meetings, this can take the form of side discussions between speakers of a certain language (as Bakor explains in section [6.2](#) of this chapter), who usually choose to sit in close proximity to each other. It is interesting that even these chats have elements from both English and Arabic as I record in the following field note during my observation at the IT open office.

Fieldnote 6.1

Ben comes into the IT room and has a chat with Osman about an unfinished task. Ben firmly asks Osman to finish the task and get back to him before the end of the day. Osman suddenly switches to Urdu and Jaffar responds in Urdu, too. They are engaged in a heated argument mentioning Ben's name repeatedly. Their argument includes Arabic words *khalas* and *in sha Allah* and also English sentences ('I told you', 'not my business' and 'I'll try'). (fieldnotes: 27/06/2013).

This does not mean that switching to include/exclude is uncommon amongst Arabic speakers in everyday interactions. However, their chances of achieving this goal in everyday situations are fewer. Since Arabic is the language of the majority, I assume that Arabic speakers cannot make use of Arabic to ensure the exclusivity of their interactions and maintain confidentiality and privacy as in the case of speakers of languages other than English and Arabic. In my field notes, I record many instances in which Arabic speakers switch to Arabic to engage in exclusive small talk without mentioning sensitive issues such as work-related conflicts. In the next section, I explain how my participants employ code-switching to appeal for assistance.

6.3.3.4 Code-switching to appeal for assistance

One of the uses of code-switching in my BELF data is appealing for assistance, especially when there is another speaker of the same L1 (cf. Klimpfinger, 2009). Appealing for assistance can be explicit, for example, asking 'what does X mean?' and other similar questions, or implicit as seen in the following extract:

Meeting extract 6.8

Participants: Hanaa: L1 Arabic (facilities admin assistant); Mohyee: L1s Arabic+ French (facilities admin assistant); Abdullah: L1 Urdu (salaries and pensions manager)

Setting: HR quarterly meeting, 21 participants: 12 Arabic speakers, 9 non-Arabic speakers

- 1 Abdullah: so why is it hard to recruit special needs candidates=
- 2 Mohyee: {looks at Hanaa} <L1fr> *difficile* {*difficult*}
- 3 Hanaa: yeah DIFFicult

In the above extract, the participants are discussing the difficulty of meeting the national recruitment and employment quotas for hiring special needs Saudi candidates. Abdullah raises a question in this regard, and the only one qualified and informed to answer is Mohyee, who is attending on behalf of his manager (Facilities Manager). Mohyee speaks Moroccan Arabic, Standard Arabic and French as first languages, and he also speaks English but with far less proficiency. Therefore, he must answer the question raised as everyone expects him to, but he seemingly cannot remember the English word he needs. He would not want to use Moroccan Arabic, unfamiliar to most non-North African Arabs, just as he would not want to use Standard Arabic, since it is not often used in everyday spoken interactions and thus perceived as odd. Therefore, feeling pressured (as his comments on this extract later in my interview with him attest), he says the French word *difficile*, while looking at the only other person who understands French (Hanaa). Hanaa takes his hint and translates the word into English to help her colleague. This is a clear example of an appeal for assistance type of code-switching. Mohyee then continues explaining the problematic situation of the facilities department by switching from English to Standard Arabic, whereupon the critical information is often translated into English by the more proficient speakers and is sometimes conveyed in side discussions.

Although incidents of explicit appeals for assistance in my data are fewer than the implicit ones, they trigger responses from most of the speakers' interlocutors who show cooperation by offering possible lexical items, as can be seen in the next extract.

Meeting extract 6.9

Participants: Anwar L1 Arabic (Financial assistant admin), Said L1 Arabic (Financial accounting manager), Tariq L1 Arabic (HR executive manager) and Bader L1 Arabic (HR Assistant manager)

Setting: HR quarterly meeting, 21 participants: 12 Arabic speakers, 9 non-Arabic speakers

- 1 Anwar: There are other reasons why you go to reinsurers one of which is:: solvency
- 2 margin which is mmm ahh what <L1 Ar> esh esmo? {what is its name?}
- 3 Tariq: <L1 Ar> almela'a almalya {solvency}
- 4 Said: <L1 Ar> hamish almela'a amlyya {solvency margin}

- 5 Bader: <L1 Ar> ewa hamish almela'a almalya {yeah solvency margin}
 6 Tariq: Yeah

In the above extract, Anwar is explaining a new concept, 'reinsurance', to the meeting attendees. Anwar is from Finance and is in the process of explaining what reinsurance is and why health insurance companies contract with reinsurance agencies. Anwar uses a specialist term that he realises his interlocutors, being from the HR Department, may not understand. Therefore, he pauses to think of a way to explain the term. He then switches to Arabic to ask *esh esmo* which literally means 'what's its name', whereupon Tariq, who is the head of HR and who, being an executive who attends executive and board meetings, apparently knows the term's meaning and gives the Arabic equivalent of 'solvency', *almela'a almalya*. Said, another representative of the Finance Department, provides a more accurate equivalent for the term by adding the word *hamish* which stands for 'margin'. This is followed by confirmations in the form of repetition from Bader and in the form of backchannel from Tariq.

Offering an Arabic equivalent to respond to the 'what does X mean?' question has become the norm even if the person asking is not actually appealing for assistance but instead looking for a clarification of a specialist term, as seen in the coming extract. Even if this need for term clarification is understood, the explanation usually starts by offering the Arabic equivalent if it exists.

Meeting extract 6.10

Participants: Said L1 Arabic (Financial accounting manager) Tariq L1 Arabic (HR executive manager) and Naser L1 Arabic (HR Assistant manager)

Setting: HR quarterly meeting, 21 participants: 12 Arabic speakers, 9 non Arabic speakers

- 1 Said: So what we did in this case is contacting one of our:: excess of loss REinsurance
 2 agents abroad and=
 3 Tariq: = Can you explain what excess of loss and and aaah what reinsurance is?
 4 Said: Reinsurance is like <L1 Ar> *a'mel ee'adat ta'meen* {doing reinsurance}
 5 (2)

- 6 Tariq: Yes we understand the word <laughs> but what does what does=
 7 Naser: =What does aah reinsurance involve? We don't understand we in HR want to
 8 understand <group laughter>

In the above extract, Said is presenting his units' achievements for the preceding quarter to the HR department. He is beginning to explain how his department dealt with one major funding difficulty by contacting a reinsuring agency. He is interrupted by the HR executive manager, who clearly knows what reinsurance agencies do in cases of loss, but wants his HR staff to understand what that specific term means. Said assumes that giving the Arabic term is the desired response to Tariq's request. This is followed by a pause of about two seconds, suggesting that the participants are waiting for Said to elaborate by giving more than the Arabic equivalent of the term. Tariq, laughingly, clarifies that he is not expecting Said to give the Arabic equivalent of the term, especially because the term itself is not ambiguous linguistically. Naser then makes it even clearer to Said that the HR staff is not aware of what the work of reinsurers involves and that this is why Tariq is asking him to explain what reinsurance is. The laughter coming from the meeting participants indicates that they agree with Naser's request to explain in detail the financial specialist term to the HR team.

Meeting extracts 6.9 and 6.10 above show that the function of explicit appeals for assistance occur basically on those occasions in which specific department-related knowledge, as in the case of explaining reinsurance, is shared with another department. As Cogo (2007) argues, code-switching in ELF is not actually flagged or signalled unless it is used as a compensatory strategy at a problematic moment, as in the case of the above extract. In the next section, I explain the use of code-switching to signify cultural background.

6.3.3.5 Code-switching to signal cultural background

One of the most frequent types of code-switching in my data is motivated by cultural reasons. This becomes clear when the speakers blend elements from their cultural background as a form of

identification. This can be explained in light of Saudi Arabia's known religiocentrism and can take the form religion-related words and phrases. The use of code-switching for signalling cultural background discussed below leads me to reflect on one of the findings of previous research on Saudi Arabia intercultural communication, i.e. religiocentrism and fatalism (see section [2.7.2](#) for relevant discussion). These frequently reported aspects of intercultural communication in interactions that include Arabs or Muslims in general are very persistent in Deema Arabia data. This feature, which is considered one of the influences of Islam on Arab cultural patterns and is now part of the linguacultural repertoires of Deema Arabia CoPs, is used nearly equally by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. For example, greetings are in Arabic most of the time, especially *asslamu alaykom*, which can be explained by the fact that most of the staff members are Muslims. However, this greeting is also used by the non-Muslim employees, especially when greeting their Muslim colleagues. Will, a non-Muslim Filipino participant, explains why he greets his colleague with *asslamu alykom*:

Extract 6.12

[Y]ou know if you say it they will say it back to you but when you say hi they can neglect you but *salam* they answer it always answer it because because it is important to them

Signalling Islamic background through code-switching is also clear through the use of the phrase *in sha Allah* ('if God wills'). *In sha Allah* was said 100 times in the recorded data to express different meanings, including its literal one. When answering a request, *in sha Allah* can mean 'yes I will' or 'I will try but I am not sure I can, depending on Allah's will'. In my data, this phrase partially loses its religious and cultural connotations, as it now serves to reply to requests by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Moreover, this use of the term by non-Muslims may indicate that they are accommodating and wish to adopt local cultural practices, as seen in Extract 13. Ben, a non-Muslim Tagalog speaker, explains his use of *in sha Allah* as follows:

Extract 6.13

@@@ I say in sha Allah yeah at the beginning I was thinking it is not for not for me:: because I am not Muslim of course but it kinda grows on you @@@ you start saying it with time you get used to it in sha Allah in sha Allah but it is not only me now even my wife say it ALL the time she she picked it up from work too

In fact, even in the instances in which non-Muslims talk about future plans without saying *in sha Allah*, one of the interlocutors does use the phrase to indicate submission to God's will, as shown in the extract below. As regards non-Arabic speaking Muslims, they do not view their use of religious Arabic phrases as Arabic since these phrases have been assimilated by their native languages over the course of centuries. Two such participants, Najam and Jaffar, express this view to me during the retrospective group interviews.

Another very common religious phrase is *alhamdulillah*, which literally means 'Praise be to Allah'. *Alhamdulillah*, however, was more exclusive to Muslims who wish to express gratitude to Allah if something positive happens or to express acceptance of God's desire when events do not turn out according to plan. Meeting extract 11 below sheds light on the dynamics and uses of two religion-related phrases: *alhamdulillah* and *in sha Allah*.

Meeting extract 6.11

Participants: Fahad: (Corporate services department manager) L1 Arabic; Ben: (IT services admin) L1 Tagalog

Setting: pre-Eid break closing meeting of the corporate services department, 35 participants: 14 Arabic speakers and 21 non-Arabic speakers

- 1 Fahad: mhm now let's hear from IT... Ben did you did you: finish from setting up the
- 2 MENA account?
- 3 Ben: yeah=
- 4 Fahad: = you have been working on it enough time now I think
- 5 Ben: = *khalas* it is ready since last week=
- 6 Fahad: = excellent *alhamdulillah* (3) a:h how about Zain account?
- 7 Ben: no not <1> yet ready</1>
- 8 Fahad: <1> o:h </1>
- 9 Ben: we need more time I told Talal and he confirmed:
- 10 Fahad: ok how long do you need?
- 11 Ben: I'm not sure but it will be ready before we break for Eid:
- 12 Fahad: *insha Allah*
- 13 Ben: yeah *insha Allah*

In the above extract, Fahad is chairing a critical meeting in which a number of unsettled accounts are discussed. Fahad is asking Ben about an account and Ben answers with a very frequent Arabic word *khalas* which can serve as a discourse marker indicating multiple meanings including 'done', 'leave it' and 'enough'. This word is used frequently in my recorded data by both Arabic and non-Arabic speakers and is studied in detail in section [6.3.9](#) on emblematic switching. Fahad shows his appreciation of Ben's achievement by saying *alhamdulillah*, but it also seems that Fahad is trying to ease the tension in the exchange. This can be explained in terms of the known rivalry between the two speakers, who are competing for the same position that Fahad holds now as explained to me in one of the group retrospective interviews. Adding *alhamdulillah* to 'excellent' can indicate genuine appreciation while at the same time rendering Fahad's style less interrogative and more collegial.

Later in the same exchange, Fahad asks about another account that was not set up by the time of the meeting, which upsets Fahad. Ben explains that he obtained an extension allowance from the executive manager in order to avoid a potential conflict arising from the delayed task completion. Fahad's tone changes immediately when he knows that Ben has Talal's approval. Fahad subsequently asks about the estimated completion time. Ben assures Fahad that the account will be ready on time and Fahad responds with another Arabic phrase having strong religious connotations: *in sha Allah*. This phrase not only indicates the desire to invoke God's will when talking about future plans, but also serves to soften the tone of the exchange. Ben signals his acceptance of Fahad's attempt to make the conversation less interrogative and less formal by repeating Fahad's utterance *in sha Allah*.

Another religious phrase that is significantly prevalent in my BELF data is *ma sha Allah*. This is a phrase that Muslims are encouraged to say in order to ward off the evil eye and envy when mentioning an achievement or describing a good quality in a person or an object. Like *alhamdulillah*, it is most common amongst Muslims who believe in the power of the phrase. In the three quarterly meetings I observe and record, *ma sha Allah* is said whenever a

successful achievement is mentioned not only by the speaker but also by most of the meeting participants. Ben, a non-Muslim Tagalog speaker, shares some of his experiences regarding his Saudi colleagues' insistence that he say *ma sha Allah* when he compliments them:

Extract 6.14

It is not a Muslim thing is a Saudi thing because I say nice things to ALL my Muslim friends ALL the time they don't ask me to say ma sha Allah but Saudis make you say ma sha Allah or they say it for you and and instead of you [...] yeah it is offensive really sometimes they interrupt you until until you say it

Although Ben states that he finds it offensive sometimes, he nonetheless aims to avoid conflicts with his Saudi colleagues by saying the phrase. This indicates that he makes a special effort for successful communication by accommodating his interlocutors not only regarding their linguistic needs but also regarding their cultural needs. This discussion of non-Muslim use of Arabic religious expressions further supports the notion of cultural hybridity characterizing BELF interactions (cf. Ehrenreich, 2009). Clearly, the linguacultural norms operating in Deema Arabia CoPs are a mix of individual, regional and business backgrounds, what Ehrenreich (2009: 141) calls 'a web of cultures'. This knowledge is, of course, not a given. It derives instead from a dynamic process in the sense that such knowledge accumulates through the course of mutual engagement amongst company members. These members gradually become experts in the CoP's shared repertoire of resources while simultaneously increasing their awareness of their colleagues' communicative needs. My findings also support Hua's (2015) argument that, in intercultural and lingua franca interactions, there is a great need to negotiate which cultural references, including conflicting ones, participants adhere to in interactions in order for a communicative event to succeed. Having discussed the use of code-switching to signify cultural identity, the next section focuses on emblematic code-switching.

6.3.3.6 Emblematic code-switching

In my data, emblematic code-switching (see sections [2.7](#) and [4.4](#) for relevant discussion) takes the form of inserting a tag, an exclamation, transitional words and phrases or gambits from Arabic into an utterance in English. This type of switch is not usually significant in terms of the intended message content, but it regulates discourse and adds smoothness and fluency to an utterance. Because it does not influence the content of the message, this form of code-switching often goes unnoticed by the different interlocutors (see also Klimpfinger, 2009). This fact becomes more evident when we consider that most of the participants could neither explain why they use Arabic transitional words and fillers nor comment on their use during the retrospective interviews. In general, participants characterize this use as a habit or a routine. In my data, as seen in the extracts above, some transitional words and phrases are uttered in Arabic repeatedly. Some of these phrases connect words, clauses and sentences but have only subtle effect on the meaning and flow of the interaction. These terms include: The Arabic definite article *al*, the Saudi Arabic relative pronoun *elli* and the conjunction used to introduce a clause as the object of a verb *inno*. The other significant use of Arabic gambits can be seen in the use of some Arabic discourse markers, which are significantly employed in the recorded data. Unlike code-switching involving transitional words, these elements can effect the fluidity and harmony of the discourse. These gambits/discourse markers include the words *ya'ani* (see also Pölzl and Seidlhofer, 2006), *khalas* and *yalla*. In fact, this type of emblematic code-switching in my BELF data represents what House (2002: 262) calls a 'routinized pragmatic phenomenon', since some of these gambits/discourse markers are used nearly equally by Arabic and non-Arabic speakers, which suggests a high level of 'pragmatic fluency' (ibid.) amongst different BELF users. Table 6 below explains what these discourse markers mean and the functions they serve in BELF communication. Other Arabic discourse markers also appear in my data; however, they are less common than the ones discussed in detail in this section.

Table 6 Arabic discourse markers used in Deema Arabia

Gambit /discourse marker	Literal meaning	Functions	Number of instances
Ya'ani	Means (v.) e.g. X means Y	Extension marker: to support a speaker's points and clarify opinions Inner negotiation marker: to mark hesitation and allow the speaker to pause and think about an accurate expression Deictic centre marker: to soften statements or propositions, so that they sound like opinions not like established facts (c.f. Pölzl and Seidlhofer, 2006)	44
Khalas	Salvation (n.)	Concluding marker: to indicate agreement on a plan or reaching the desired goal of a conversation Dismissive marker: to mark the strong desire to end a conversation as in saying 'enough', to answer questions about task completion as in saying 'done', and to encourage moving on as 'leave it' or 'forget it'.	34
Yalla	Oh Allah	Start marker: To mark the beginning of an event Encouragement: To encourage someone's participation in an activity as in 'come on', 'do it' and 'Let's go'. Summoning: To ask someone to hurry up as in saying 'come on hurry up', and to reply to rushing requests as in 'I'm coming'	19

Instances of emblematic code-switching in my data are very numerous. The figures above come from the recorded meeting language only, because of the difficulty of keeping track of such switches in my field notes. However, the prevalence of emblematic code-switching in the meeting language alone makes it stand out as a key function of code-switching in BELF in

Saudi MNCs. The following two extracts are taken from two different business meetings, each of which contains several moments of emblematic code-switching.

Meeting extract 6.12

Participants: Ibtehal L1 Arabic (CEO secretary), Bader L1 Arabic (Corporate services manager) Talal L1 Arabic (Executive manager/CEO brother), Nadeem L1 Hindi (visiting IT consultant)

Setting: IT leading team with executive board to discuss a proposal meeting, 17 participants: 8 Arabic speakers and 10 non Arabic speakers including 2 NESs

- 1 Ibtehal: I think everyone is here, Tal (.) except Nadeem {looks at Fahad} he said
- 2 <L1 Ar> *inno* (that) he will be late <L1 Ar> *wala?* {or not}
- 3 Bader: <L1 Ar> *la la la* {no no no} he is here
- 4 Talal: Oh ok
- 5 (2 minutes/attendees chatting)
- 6 {Nadeem enters the room}
- 7 Nadeem: {looks at Tal} <L1 Ar> *assalamu alaykom* {peace be upon you}
- 8 {addresses everyone in a louder tone} hello everyone
- 9 (replies in English 'hello, hi' and Arabic 'ahlan, hala, salam')
- 10 Talal: <L1 Ar> *Ahlan* {welcome} Nadeem hmmm have a seat <L1 Ar> *yalla*
- 11 *tawakalna ala Allah* {come on we rely on Allah} let's start guys.

This exchange occurs before starting a meeting in which two NESs participate. Ibtehal, the CEO's secretary attending on his behalf, addresses Talal, saying that all expected meeting attendees are present, indicating that Talal can start the meeting. She then realizes that one of the key meeting participants, Nadeem, is not in the room and asks Bader if he knows whether Nadeem will be late. She asks using the Arabic tag *wala* ('or not'). Bader answers in Arabic saying *la la la* ('no no no') and continues in English saying that he is here, indicating perhaps that they should wait for him. Two minutes later, Nadeem enters the meeting room, looks at Talal and greets him with *assalamu alaykom*, followed by 'hi everyone', a greeting inclusive of the various attendees, who return the greeting in English or Arabic. Talal then replies in Arabic saying '*ahlan*' to Nadeem and starts the meeting saying '*yalla*' (see Table 3 above) to signal to everyone that the meeting is starting. He follows *yalla* with *tawakalna ala*

Allah, a religious phrase that is not common in my data but is probably used here because it is the first day of Ramadan (the Islamic Holy month), when conservative Muslims tend to be more religious (at least outwardly) than the rest of the year. This phrase marks the beginning of an event while seeking Allah's help for the future.

It is noteworthy that this is the only meeting exchange that contains moments of code-switching. During the rest of the meeting, participants follow the code-switching norms of high-stakes meetings that include NESs (see section 5.3 of this chapter). It is evident from the smooth flow of conversation and the lack of clarification questions that these instances of code-switching do not affect the intended meaning of the utterances. Indeed, most of the meeting participants are aware that it is time to start the meeting and are actively listening to this exchange as they wait. This smoothness in emblematic use is not always the case. In some cases, emblematic code-switching can have strong strategic value, as Meeting extract 6.13 shows.

Meeting extract 6.13

Participants: Anwar L1 Arabic (Financial assistant admin), Tariq L1 Arabic (HR executive manager) and Sallahuddin L1 Pashto (HR assistant admin)

Setting: HR quarterly meeting, 21 participants: 12 Arabic speakers, 9 non Arabic speakers

- 1 Tariq: *ya'ani* when you write aaah you sign a contract you wrote aaah the
- 2 expected but you didn't earn it yet?=
3 Anwar=exactly=
4 Sallahuddin: =aaah the other point which is aaah <Ln Ar> *ya'ani*:: (?) flat (?) for
5 the past three years Deema share was flat why why was it flat (?) for the past
6 three years?
7 Anwar: aah hmm=
8 Sallahuddin: =is it market failure?=
9 Anwar: @@ no not that simple=
10 Tariq: =market segregation?
11 Anwar: <L1 Ar> LA LA {NO NO} it think it's aah <L1 Ar> *ya'ani* it's a complex
12 question <L1 Ar> *la'anno* (because) every year <1> has:: different dynamics

13 </1>
 14 Sallahuddin: <1>You don't have to answer by the way if you don't:: ah
 15 @@@</1>
 16 Anwar: @@ La la it is very interesting hmm for 2012 we started ...

As in Meeting extracts 6.9 and 6.10, this extract a continuation of the financial segment of the HR Department quarterly meeting. Anwar is still explaining the process of reinsurance to his HR colleagues. This exchange is particularly interesting in exemplifying the use of emblematic code-switching because the gambit *ya'ani* is used three times to serve different discourse functions. In the Q and A segment, Anwar is asked about how writing a reinsured contract is different from writing regular contracts. He gives an explanation of the process, after which Tariq rephrases what he understands from this lengthy explanation by asking a question starting with the word *ya'ani*, which serves as an extension marker to clarify a point made by another speaker. The validity of his interpretation is confirmed by Anwar, who replies with the word 'exactly'. Sallahuddin, a non-Arabic speaker, suddenly takes the floor to ask about another point that Anwar made earlier in his segment regarding Deema's market share. In line 4, Sallahuddin uses *ya'ani* as an inner negotiation marker (see Table 6 above) to pause and formulate his question while guarding his place and holding the attention of the meeting participants. This utterance is a clear example of the strategic use of *ya'ani* by a non-Arabic speaker who draws on his pragmatic expertise to achieve his communicative goal. Anwar seems surprised by the sudden topic shift and hesitates, signalling that he is reflecting on Sallahuddin's question. Sallahuddin then offers a possible explanation, which Anwar laughs at because he thinks it is simplistic. Another explanation is then offered by Tariq, the HR executive manager. Although Tariq's explanation is also not that of a specialist, Anwar does not laugh at it as he does when Sallahuddin mentions 'market failure' as a possible explanation for the problem in question. Anwar's response may be due to the seniority of Tariq's position, which causes Anwar to change his tone in line 11 when he answers Sallahuddin's question with '*la la*' ('no no') to strongly negate Sallahuddin's explanations. To discourage more similar non-expert answers, Anwar says *ya'ani* ('it's a complex question'). *Ya'ani* in this utterance can serve two strategic functions: to soften the tone of the following

statements and ensure the legitimacy of the question raised, even if it is 'a complex question', and to mark hesitation and allow time for reflecting and finding an accurate answer to the 'complex question' raised. Anwar then switches to Arabic again, saying '*la'anno*' ('because') in another instance of emblematic code-switching. He starts explaining how every year is different when, in line 12, Sallahuddin, as I assume, notices Anwar's sarcasm and hesitation and interrupts him to say: 'You don't have to answer by the way if you don't', and laughs. The fact that he does not use a specific verb after 'don't' leaves his withdrawal of the question open to interpretation. It can be interpreted as a face-saving tactic on the part of Sallahuddin, whose utterance can be finished as either 'if you don't know the answer' or 'if you don't see the validity of the question'. Anwar then laughs and says that he does not mind answering Sallahuddin's question, which he now describes as a 'very interesting', which appears to be a self/other face-saving move by Anwar that apparently restores the harmony of this communicative event. Anwar then continues by presenting his answer to Sallahuddin's question.

From the two extracts discussed above, it can be argued that emblematic code-switching may not influence the meaning of the intended messages (e.g. Meeting Extract 6.12), but it can be employed strategically as a pragmatic resource to serve specific discursive functions (e.g. Meeting extract 6.13). In the next section, I present the last social function of code-switching my data reveals, which is rapport building.

6.3.3.7 Code-switching to build rapport

One of the functions that code-switching fulfils for my participants is to build rapport. This rapport building can take the form of participants' use of terms of endearment, such as 'my friend' or 'my brother', taken from their interlocutors' languages. In addition, participants frequently use the Arabic term of endearment *habibi*, which literally means 'my love'. Code-switching for rapport building is also explicit in the use of thanking and greeting words. In fact, this is almost the only case in which BELF users in my research field switch to languages other than English and Arabic.

This type of code-switching is used to express solidarity with the interlocutors (cf. Pullin-Stark, 2009), to build rapport and interpersonal relationships and to help create a friendly work atmosphere, which in turn builds a stronger sense of a community. This is best demonstrated by Ben's statement on his multilingual practices:

Extract 6.15

[L]anguage cleverness makes relationships rich I mean we all speak English well enough to conduct our daily business in it right? but this this hmm one language rule {signs quotation marks with his hands} does not aah refrain us from joking and and sharing with each other in our different languages and still still remain inclusive you know nobody is left behind or or hmm ignored [...] we sometimes translate and come up with new words mixing from languages.

I pressed him for an example of his use of a word from a language other than English and Arabic for the purposes he describes. After taking two minutes to think, he explains:

Extract 6.16

Small and funny things like like (bahai) in Urdu it means brother (.) I say it to Jafaar and Najem @@@ they say I do not pronounce it properly

Like Ben, Haidar, who speaks five languages, explains how his code choice depends on his interlocutors. If it happens that he speaks the first language of his interlocutor, he switches to this language and abandons English, which he describes as 'the obstacle of a third language':

Extract 6.17

I speak five languages and I love to speak to people in their language [...] I do not like the obstacle of a third language aah which is English in most cases (.) depending on whom I am talking with I try to talk in their language (.) In order to be closer to the other I prefer to choose the language of the person in front of me that is if I know this language adequately @@@

Although the above participants confirm switching to their interlocutors' languages for the sake of rapport building, examples that support their claims from the recorded spoken interactions are scarce. This may be due to the formal nature that governs communication in meetings, the only source of naturally occurring interactions in my data (the only exception is the Arabic word *habibi*, which constitutes most of the examples of the rapport building function of code-switching in the recorded meetings). However, rapport building emerges as a prevalent theme in the ethnographic interviews, as most of my interviewees indicate that they pick up words from their colleagues' languages and do use them occasionally, even if jokingly. The rapport building function of code-switching is also a dominant theme in my field notes, which record language use among the staff members while they go about their daily work. For instance, the following field note presents a record of my brief visit to the Accounting Department, where the following incident occurs.

Fieldnote 6.2

A Saudi female accountant complains (in Arabic) about not being competent at using the new software which has been imposed on them recently and says that she needs more than double the time she used to need with the previous software. Her Saudi male colleague then points at their Filipino female colleague, who was not paying attention to their conversation since it was in Arabic, and said that she is a master in this software and that maybe she can help her. The Saudi female accountant then approaches the seemingly very busy female Filipino colleague and says: 'Mary *ya maganda inti*' ('Mary you beautiful') and then Mary turns and looks at her while the Saudi female employee starts asking about some of the software functions and pulls up a chair and sits next to Mary and they continue in what seems like a tutorial. (fieldnotes: 21/07/2013).

In the incident described above, the Saudi employee needs the expertise of her Filipino colleague (Mary). She therefore addresses Mary using the Tagalog word *maganda* (beautiful) with the Arabic second person pronoun *inti* (you). This code-switch, I assume, is meant to soften the request and ensure a positive response from Mary. The use of *maganda* does not surprise Mary, which points toward the commonality of this practice in their department's

CoP. Mary responds positively to her colleague's request even though she is immersed in her own work tasks, and the two engage in a cooperative, collegial moment of knowledge sharing. This instance resonates with Rampton's (1995) work on crossing, which shows that speakers may creatively appropriate the voices of others across language boundaries, even while possessing a very limited knowledge of the languages being appropriated. Thus, they construct allegiances with social groups that are not their own (Blommaert, 2005; Rampton, 1995, 2006), and cross traditionally established boundaries between categories while claiming new, non-normative identities.

Field notes similar to the above are numerous; however some of them describe interactions among certain of my interviewees subsequent to my interviews with them. This fact leads me to surmise that this not a common practice per se, but rather a consequence of my presence. This fact is especially important to note because my research questions and aims become somewhat explicit to certain participants during the interviews. For example, I record in my field notes that some of the interviewees look at me while or immediately after they code-switch with their colleagues.

Arabic speakers also frequently switch to Arabic to address non-Arabic speakers using words like *ya jama'a* (an informal collective noun to address a group of people) and *shabab* ('guys'). This type of switch on the part of a senior Arabic-speaking staff member addressing employees at a lower organizational level may indicate a desire to sound friendly and to maintain a collegial relationship as opposed to a manager-subordinate relationship. Meeting extract 6.14 below illustrates this strategic use of code-switching.

Meeting extract 6.14

Participants: Adel: L1 Arabic (Corporate services vice-manager); Haidar: L1 Malayalam (IT services admin); Ben: L1 Tagalog (IT services admin)

Setting: the open office of the IT services department

- 1 Adel: <L1 Ar> *ha shabab* {oh guys} what did you do
- 2 Haidar: <L1 Ar> *mushkila* {a problem}
- 3 Adel: no::
- 4 Ben: it's not big <L1 Ar> *mushkila* {problem} (2) just wait for Will=
- 5 Haidar: = Will is in the house in London with Tal
- 6 (3)
- 7 Adel: it is a problem {leaves the room}

Unlike the previous extracts, this one does not come from a business meeting. I am interviewing Ben, who insists on having the interview in the IT open office where he can be near his computer and his telephone. The IT department has an emergency related to the settings of one of the major client corporate accounts. Adel enters the room and addresses his question to the IT staff in general, saying in Arabic *ha shabab* to find out how they are progressing in their attempts to deal with the emergency. The use of the word *shabab* here may indicate a desire to show support and solidarity in this problematic situation and to indicate that his inquiry is meant to be on a collegial level rather than on a manager-subordinate one. Haidar, a non-Arabic speaker, then replies in Arabic saying *mushkila*, one of the Arabic words commonly used in my data, an utterance which apparently disappoints Adel. Ben, another non-Arabic speaker, then interrupts his interview with me and tries to reassure Adel by referring to Haidar's code choice and saying that 'it's not a big *mushikla*', but we have to wait for Will, who is known for his expertise in dealing with similar problematic situations. When Haidar clarifies that Will left on a trip with the vice president the preceding night, they realize that the problem is actually more complicated than they first assumed. Adel, the only Arabic speaker in the room (excluding myself), then switches to English in his next utterance and admits that it is actually 'a problem'.

This extract is one of the most striking code-switching instances in my data. This is due to the fact that switching to Arabic is performed by non-Arabic speakers who, apparently, find the word *mushkila* more apt to describe the situation than 'problem', which Adel chooses to use. I argue that this extract is representative of the everyday intercultural communicative events

through BELF in Saudi MNCs, and it fits nicely at the end of this chapter on code-switching along the lines that it is a telling illustration of its use in Deema Arabia.

6.4 Discussion and summary

This chapter starts with a discussion of the shared repertoire of multilingual resources in Deema Arabia CoPs. Based on my discussion of the CoP's linguascape, I find it important to corroborate BELF/ELF researchers' views on the need for re-conceptualizing certain long-established concepts in sociolinguistics, such as L2 competence and speech communities (cf. Cogo and Dewey, 2012; Kaur, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2007a). However, I extend this need for reconceptualization to the definition of ELF/BELF in a way that acknowledges the role that other languages play within its framework. As Ehrenreich (2011) argues, any conceptualization of BELF as a mode of communication should involve 'non-essentialist notions such as strategic flexibility and cultural hybridity' (p. 25), which are reflected in the infusion of various elements from the different L1s of the CoP members. Therefore, this chapter presents specific instances of how Arabic, the language of the habitat of the majority of the CoP members, influences BELF use. My discussion points toward the imperative of studying the role other languages, especially the language of the habitat, on BELF use.

In close relation to the topics of multilingual repertoire and cultural hybridity, the first communicative strategy extensively employed by Deema Arabia's CoP members is code-switching, which this chapter discusses next. Clearly, in a setting like MNCs, examining codes in the same way that mainstream sociolinguistic research examines them can be problematic. Gumperz (1982), for example, proposes that two codes characteristically signal the conflicting cultural standards of a minority community and the larger community in which it exists. He further argues that bilinguals tend to regard the ethnically specific minority language as a 'we-code' associated with familiarity and solidarity, whereas they tend to consider the majority language as a 'they-code' associated with 'more formal, stiffer, and less personal out-group relations' (ibid.: 66). Gumperz (ibid.) is apparently referring to code alternation in established

speech communities with established conventions and practices rather than to a BELF CoP. Gumperz's (ibid.) dichotomy is not applicable to a BELF context where ethnicities tend to be blurred and other factors, including power relationships, are at play. Nonetheless, as section [6.3.2](#) demonstrates, NESs in Deema Arabia are still perceived as a pressure group that can lead BELF users to monitor their use of code-switching, either because of their awareness of NESs' lesser abilities to use or comprehend code switches, or because of the power assigned to the NESs regarding the use of English.

This chapter subsequently discusses the communicative functions of code-switching. In contrast to the arguments that oppose any conceptualization of code-switching that is described as refining its communicative functions (e.g. Baily, 2000), the discursive analysis of my business meeting data finds that most of the instances of code-switching are interactionally meaningful and symbolic. By examining the effect of these switches on the consequent turns and considering the wider context in which they take place, I have argued that most code-switching instances in my data serve at least one communicative function, as the extracts throughout this chapter illustrate. Therefore, my results agree with sociolinguists (e.g. Gumperz, 1985; Romaine, 2000) and ELF researchers (e.g. Cogo, 2009; Klimpfinger, 2005, 2009) who label code-switching as a communicative strategy, despite the criticism of that this label (see section [4.4.1](#) for criticism of this label).

In my analysis of code-switching instances, guided by the principles of interactional sociolinguistics (see Chapter 5 for discussion), I agree with Stroud's (1998: 322) argument that 'conversational code-switching is so heavily implicated in social life that it cannot really be understood apart from an understanding of social phenomena'. As Stroud suggests, I strive to present an analysis grounded in an understanding of the context within which communication takes place. By presenting detailed background information including my participants' views on code-switching use in their CoP, I provide data that supports and complements my own analysis of the extracts.

Chapter 7 Achieving Communicative Goals through Interactional Support in BELF

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter showed how code-switching is actively utilized to achieve meaning making through BELF in Deema communities of practice (CoPs). In this chapter, I explore how participants achieved communicative goals through interactional support and different communicative strategies in the recorded business meetings. These strategies were not as prevalent and as extensively used as code-switching and therefore do not require the same space in this thesis as the latter. The strategies were, however, of paramount value to the success of the BELF interactions. There are two main types of meaning-making strategies utilized in my BELF data. The first type is same-speaker strategies, i.e. strategies used by the main/first speaker, which include paraphrasing and hedging. The second type is other-speaker strategies, i.e. those strategies employed by the recipient, which include backchannels and utterance completion. These strategies are multifunctional and can be employed to serve different purposes. They are also affected by the nature of relationships between different interlocutors and reflect these relationships. This is important because, in business meetings, both power and solidarity provide a strong heuristic in interpreting communicative strategies employed by BELF users, as the discussion of extracts in this chapter reveals.

In this chapter, I begin by exploring how BELF users employ paraphrasing either to repair a problematic utterance or to resolve incidents of non-understanding. I then examine the use of hedging as a means to show interpersonal support and to avoid potential miscommunication, especially in manager-subordinate interactions. Next, I look at how interlocutors, especially senior staff members, strategically use backchannels either to show support and solidarity or to show power. I end the chapter by examining another cooperative interactional strategy that emerged as a key feature of BELF communication in Deema CoPs, i.e. utterance completion.

7.2 Same-speaker strategies

In my data, different same-speaker strategies are employed to pre-empt potential understanding problems, to serve as a repair technique in moments of non/misunderstanding, and to maintain the smoothness and the flow of an interaction. The most influential same-speaker strategies in my data are code-switching (which has been extensively discussed in Chapter 6), paraphrasing, and hedging (both of which are discussed below). Other strategies (e.g. repetitions) are also manifested in the recorded interactions, but they are not as commonplace as the features discussed in this chapter and therefore will not be looked at closely due to space constraints. In the next section, I discuss the use of paraphrasing as it emerged in the data.

7.2.1 Paraphrasing

This section investigates how paraphrase can be used to negotiate meaning and co-construct understanding in BELF. Paraphrasing entails displaying and giving information in a different way, 'either by simplifying the form of the message or by expressing it in different words' (Neil 1996: 142). Like code-switching, paraphrase is utilized by the participants to secure understanding, especially if shared understanding is perceived to be threatened and if the information conveyed is important and needs emphasis. Paraphrase in such cases can enhance and reinforce meaning or, as Neil (*ibid.*: 141) puts it, can serve 'the purpose of amplification'. One of the participants, Jaffer, states the following on paraphrase:

Extract 7.1

[B]ecause aah I obviously I can't speak Arabic so I repeat (.) I mean I repeat what I say in different ways you know?

Jaffer's statement signifies the importance of paraphrase when dealing with moments of non/misunderstanding, especially in cases where relying on code-switching as a communicative strategy may not be an option due to one speaker's inability to speak the other's language. In this specific situation, repeating an utterance 'in different ways' can

increase chances of understanding and enhance comprehension. Thus, in seeking to establish and maintain mutual understanding, BELF speakers employ paraphrase as a means of emphasizing elements of their talk and to enhance understanding, especially when their talk contains signals that suggest the possibility of non-understanding, be it in relation to a single lexical item or to the whole utterance (see also Kaur, 2009). In my data, paraphrase is employed to serve the purpose of accommodation as a pre-emptive measure, as described by Jaffer above, and to act as a repair strategy. The function of repair in the data is seen when there is no clear sign of non-understanding except a lack of uptake, i.e. delayed response, and when there are explicit problems of understanding. These functions are examined in the sections below, which illuminate that the functions are not always clear and straightforward.

7.2.1.1 Pre-emptive paraphrase

One of the functions of paraphrase in my data is to pre-empt potential problems of understanding. Unlike paraphrase for repair (discussed below), in pre-emptive paraphrase, there are no signs to indicate that an utterance is not understood. Extract 3 below is one of these cases. Here a speaker's choice of unfamiliar lexical items prompts a paraphrase from one of his interlocutors. Meeting extract 7.1 below is the concluding part of a very long discussion of one of the contract requirements of a very important potential client.

Meeting extract 7.1

Participants: Nazmi L1: Arabic (Senior Accountant), John L1: English (Claims and underwriting manager), Talal L1: Arabic (Executive manager/CEO brother), Abbad L1: Arabic (Claims and underwriting assistant)

Setting: Executives quarterly meeting, 18 participants: 11 Arabic speakers, 7 non-Arabic speakers (3 NESs)

- 1 Nazmi: so just to clarify, do you think that they shouldn't they:: should not have
- 2 this item XXX in the in the contract at all or are you saying that it is okay to be
- 3 there as the final option?
- 4 John: I think and I:: think the board agrees that we would say that it is absolutely

5 a last resort

6 Nazmi: but as you know there is a mention or a:: mention yeah of an advisory

7 and and improvement body (.) do you want to: make comment to comment on

8 that?

9 Abbad: <Looks at Loay> I will answer this if if you don't mind Loay <addresses

10 Nazmi> again basically I know that the MOF aaah DOES require the

11 implementation of this body (.) we have some concerns again about the details

12 around it and how it will be ACTually executed aah I think that best practice in

13 other aaah <1> the best practice elsewhere </1>

14 John: <1>I think we will bounce back </1> to this when we hear from the legal

15 advisor

16 Talal: yes we will come back to this later when we hear from our lawyer.

17 John: yeah later today after < LN Ar> Dhohor {noon}.

18 Nazmi: I think it will be interesting to know for sure from a specialist

The discussion is intense. The feasibility of signing this contract is debated with strong opposing views, and it is concluded that no decision will be made before meeting with the company's legal advising team. The extract is interesting to examine because it contains two instances of paraphrase. Nazmi comes late to the meeting and misses most of the discussion. In line 1, he asks about the final decision about accepting this item on the contract using the phrase 'final option'. John, one of three NESs and one of the board members strongly opposing this item of the contract, confirms Nazmi's understanding but instead of using Nazmi's description 'final option', he says 'last resort'. John's reformulation here is interesting because it does not seem to serve an interactional function that would contribute to the meaning making. This indicates that labelling instances of paraphrase according to interactional function is not always straightforward, as I clarified earlier. Replacing the word 'option' with 'resort', I assume, may point towards John's desire to exploit his NES abilities to exert the image of 'knowledgeable board member'. This form of paraphrase can be seen again in lines 14-15 of this extract. In line 6, Nazmi raises another question about the same item, and Abbad takes over the turn to answer him after asking for Loay's permission to talk. Abbad explains the company's position in detail, restating what has been said earlier in the same meeting before Nazmi joined it. John, who wants to end this repeated conversation, interrupts here by saying, 'I think we will bounce back to this when we

hear from the legal advisor'. Talal then rephrases John's statement using more semantically transparent, more common lexical items, replacing 'bounce back' with 'come back' and 'legal advisor' with 'lawyer'. This seems like an instance of other-speaker paraphrase for the purpose of pre-empting potential understanding problems because of the less familiar word choice used in the utterance. By paraphrasing, Tariq seems to demonstrate his knowledge of his colleagues' abilities and limitations. Although it should be noted that this is a board meeting with staff members at the highest managerial level of the company whose English language abilities are generally above average for Deema Arabia, Tariq's rephrase is likely meant not only to avoid potential understanding problems, but also to soften the tension and to save face for Nazmi and Abbad after John's sudden interruption. Tariq's rephrase also prompts John to take the turn again, at which point John gives more details regarding the timing of the meeting using a Saudi cultural time reference, *Dhohor*, in reference to noon prayer break. The tone that John uses in this utterance indicates that he is also trying to sound less authoritarian and bossy as he gives unnecessary details about the timing of the meeting with the legal advisor. Nazmi takes the clue that this conversation should not continue any longer and ends the conversation by agreeing to wait for later to 'know for sure from a specialist', as suggested by John.

Talal's paraphrase exhibited in the meeting extract above is used as a precaution to ensure mutual understanding by making a potentially problematic utterance more explicit and transparent. Nonetheless, not all BELF users are equally sensitive to the possibility of non-understanding arising from their utterances or to the different levels of proficiencies of members of their CoPs. The next two sections explain further how paraphrase, as a tool for BELF users to explicate meaning, is applied when non-understanding or misunderstanding occur. Specifically, the sections define and discuss two functions of paraphrase: paraphrasing for lack of uptake and paraphrasing to repair non/misunderstanding.

7.2.1.2 Paraphrasing for lack of uptake

Unlike other types of paraphrase for repair, in paraphrase for lack of uptake there is no explicit evidence of non-understanding or misunderstanding in the recipient's preceding turn. Paraphrasing is meant to proactively increase the comprehensibility of any potentially problematic segments of talk as perceived by the speakers. Utilizing the communicative strategy of paraphrase, the speaker strives to maintain shared understanding with their interlocutors. This suggests that in business CoPs, paraphrase can fulfil the need for emphasis and accuracy paramount for communication to succeed.

One of the settings in which paraphrase is used is when a speaker's utterance, unexpectedly, does not trigger a response from their interlocutors. This is what Kaur (2009: 151) calls 'lack of uptake'. In business CoPs, this lack of uptake can be a result of different factors such as the degree of formality, the hierarchy of the different meeting participants and the strict turn-taking management in business meetings. The lack of uptake in my data usually leads the speaker to paraphrase their original utterances (or to repeat them, in rare cases) as will be seen in the following Meeting extract.

Meeting extract 7.2

Participants: Talal L1: Arabic (Executive manager/ brother of the CEO); Najeeb L1: Urdu (Talal's office manager), Omar L1: Urdu (Call centre team leader), Bader L1: Arabic (Services admin team leader)

Setting: Services department's quarterly meeting, 38 participants: 19 Arabic speakers, 19 non-Arabic speakers

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Talal: we are still working through some of the eco analysis (.) aaah |
| 2 | analysis ehm stuff, <1> especially </1> regarding benefits. |
| 3 | Najeeb: <1> yeah </1> |
| 4 | Talal: howEVER this standard should be going into clearance soon |
| 5 | (1) |
| 6 | Talal: this is this is great <1> news </1> it it will:: be (.) taken out it will be |
| 7 | no longer part of the specification. |
| 8 | Najeeb: <1> Sure </1> |

9 Omar: oh nice mashallah
 10 Bader: great wallah
 11 Talal: yeah inshallah aah we still have a little bit of work to do so we kind of
 12 get the kind of corporate profile needed for the analysis
 13 (2)
 14 Talal: <L1 Ar> AIMODhesh inno {the amazing [thing] is that} even though
 15 the number of the backover incidents grew up last year
 16 Najeeb: yeah it went up significantly
 17 Talal: interestingly though the number of BOF went down

Talal, the executive manager who oversees all the operations in the company, is addressing the staff of three different services departments. Talal is attending this meeting with his office manager, Najeeb, whom he describes in the same meeting as his 'right hand'. Talal compliments the teams on their performances in the preceding quarter and then gives an overview of the company's overall performance in the same period. In this extract, Talal explains one of the critical items on the agenda, namely an area in which the department is not doing well. He expresses his understanding of the departments' underachievement in this area, stating that based on the analysis conducted by the senior managers the situation will change. In line 4, he introduces the planned change, stating that this problematic standard that the department failed to meet will 'be going into clearance soon'. However, none of his interlocutors respond. After a short pause, Talal adds that this piece of information should be 'great news', and with an overlapping backchannel, Najeeb confirms Talal's statement. Following a short pause again, and after the clear lack of uptake from the recipients, Talal rephrases his statement by saying that the standard 'will be taken out' and then follows up with yet another paraphrase (i.e. 'it will be no longer part of the specification') to reinforce comprehensibility of his prior utterance. Talal's repeated paraphrasing can be attributed to the fact that even though the information shared is important, it does not initially trigger any verbal response from his interlocutors, with the exception of the backchannel from Najeeb, who knew about the announcement before the meeting and whose response is therefore not important to Talal. In short, Talal uses paraphrase to enhance understanding of critical information which will impact the department's performance in the upcoming quarter. Two participants then respond to Talal's announcement saying 'Oh nice *mashallah*' (line 9) and

‘Great *wallah*’ (line 10), which indicates they do understand the specification amendment and appreciate it too. These responses signal Talal to continue his segment and move on to the next point.

After a two second pause, in line 14 Talal continues talking about the same item on the agenda using an Arabic lexical item (this part of the extract is fully discussed in Chapter 6 on code-switching). Pointing at a chart on the screen, Talal explains the rise in one of the columns saying ‘the backover incidents grew up last year’. Najeeb interrupts Talal to confirm the statement while rephrasing it by replacing ‘grew up’ with ‘went up’. This paraphrase can serve as an example of other-repair and other-paraphrase. In spite of the common use of what can be conventionally described as ‘non standard’, this is the only incident of other-repair of lexical choice in my data. This lack of repair in Deema CoPs implies that BELF users are in the habit of ignoring linguistic ‘anomalies’ as they are more focused on the intended meaning of utterances as will be further elaborated in the discussion section (7.4) of this chapter (cf. Firth, 1996; Kankaanranta and Planken, 2010 and see section 4.2.1.1 in this thesis for relevant discussion). Talal then continues explaining the chart, talking about another column that ‘went down’, thus taking Najeeb’s hint about the appropriate lexical item to be used in explaining charts.

Although not very commonplace, the lack of uptake in the above extract could be a result of non-understanding as the meeting participants’ linguistic competences vary. However, lack of uptake can also happen in senior staff meetings in which participants presumably have greater proficiency of English. This can be further demonstrated in Meeting extract 7.3 below.

Meeting extract 7.3

Participants: Loay L1: Arabic (CEO/Owner), Anwar L1: Arabic (Financial assistant admin)

Setting: Executive quarterly meeting, 18 participants: 11 Arabic speakers, 7 non-Arabic speakers (3 NESs)

- 1 Loay: this is what I was trying to clarify it is:: it is one of the grey areas again you
- 2 know you should know that we do not have the final say on this right?
- 3 (2)

- 4 Loay: it is very unclear and very unpredictable and at the end of the day it is not
5 our decision=
6 Anwar: =of course

In this extract, Loay is discussing the problematic financial situation of a current corporate account. One of the meeting participants asks him to comment on what might happen next. Loay replies by showing his uncertainty of the situation, using the idiomatic expression 'grey area' and explaining that the final decision is not his or the company's. Loay ends his statement with the tag question 'right', expecting a response from his interlocutors. His tag, however, is followed by a two-second pause and no response from the meeting participants. This lack of response leads Loay to paraphrase his statement using 'very unclear and very unpredictable' instead of the idiomatic expression 'grey area' and using 'not our decision' instead of 'we do not have the final say'. This paraphrase triggers responses from his interlocutors in the form of backchannels which show understanding and support.

Paraphrase of a prior segment following lack of uptake by a recipient where a response is relevant and even needed may indicate that the paraphrasing is a means of signalling lack of mutual understanding. This lack of uptake leads speakers to take the initiative to paraphrase their potentially problematic utterances and to emphasize the content of their original utterances.

Lack of uptake is not the only motivation for BELF users to employ paraphrase. In some cases, there are more explicit signals of non/misunderstanding which lead the speakers or their interlocutors to paraphrase in order to repair moments of non/misunderstanding problems as will be seen in the next section.

7.2.1.3 Paraphrasing to repair non-understanding/misunderstanding

The other function that paraphrasing serves is as a repair procedure in instances of non-understanding or misunderstanding. This procedure takes place after an interlocutor overtly displays non-understanding and asks for clarification, or when the triggered response does not conform to the speaker's expectations. In these cases, using paraphrase, the speaker

offers the recipient an alternative formulation of the problematic utterance and gives them the time to understand and make sense of the original utterance. In most of these cases, the paraphrase is prefaced with a corrective 'no' or 'I mean' or the Arabic discourse marker *ya'ani* (see section 6.3.9 for different functions of this discourse maker). This function of paraphrase is demonstrated in the following extracts.

Meeting extract 7.4

Participants: Tariq L1: Arabic (HR executive manager), Bakkar L1: Arabic (Services admin)

Setting: The services departments' quarterly meeting, 38 participants: 19 Arabic speakers, 19 non-Arabic speakers

- 1 Tariq: so you are participating and you:: you are EXPECTING on-the-spot
- 2 sign ups?
- 3 (.)
- 4 Bakkar: hmm what do you mean?
- 5 Tariq: I mean they're gonna be new contracts signed in the exhibition *ya'ani*=
- 6 Bakkar: =yeah yeah yeah sure inshallah
- 7 Tariq: do you think you will get some new corporate accounts mmm maybe like
- 8 small firms or only new individual accounts?
- 9 Bakkar: hmm last year only individual orders so yes I think most probably
- 10 individuals do on-the-spot orders (.) but they say it is gonna be bigger this year
- 11 so may be we have two three corporate accounts <L1 Ar> *kaman* {too} on the
- 12 spot=
- 13 Tariq: =yeah=
- 14 Bakkar: =but we sometimes get some on-the-spot cancellations too because
- 15 you can find....

In this extract, the services department is discussing their upcoming participation in a national exhibition for health insurance companies in Saudi Arabia and the GCC. Tariq, the HR executive manager who is attending just the beginning of this meeting to represent his department, asks Bakkar, the staff member in charge of Deema Arabia's representation in the exhibition, if he expects 'on-the-spot sign ups'. After a short pause, Bakkar shows his non-understanding of Tariq's question by asking him 'what do you mean'? Being a member

of the HR CoP, Tariq's choice of words is apparently unfamiliar to Bakkar, who is part of the services' CoP and has another set of terminology in his repertoire to talk about participation in exhibitions. Tariq then rephrases 'on-the-spot sign ups' by saying 'new contracts signed in the exhibition *ya'ani*'. Bakkar latches to confirm that he now understands Tariq's question. Tariq then continues to ask another question, saying 'new accounts', and this time he avoids the problematic description used in his prior turn. However, Bakkar replies using Tariq's term 'on-the-spot' twice in lines 10 and 11 and again in line 14 when he talks about potential cancellations too. Bakkar's use of 'on-the-spot' demonstrates the collaborative nature of both BELF communication and learning in Deema CoPs. Considering that the CoP model in itself is based on social learning through practice (Wenger, 1998), Bakkar's adoption of Tariq's expression represents how the CoP members expand their knowledge of the CoP's shared repertoire through mutual engagement and interacting with each other. Learning, in this sense, concerns not only the CoP's core practice, but also how to talk about the practice in general.

In the above case, the paraphrase has a clear interactional role as it contributes directly to the co-construction of mutual understanding and thus ensures the success of the interaction. The problematic lexical item is identified and then explicated to resolve the moment of non-understanding. This is also exhibited in the next extract.

Meeting extract 7.5

Participants: Fahad L1: Arabic (Corporate services department manager), and Bader L1: Arabic (Services admin team leader)

Setting: Services department quarterly meeting, 38 participants: 19 Arabic speakers, 19 non-Arabic speakers

- 1 Fahad: ok hmm but this hmmm in the leaflet (.) I do not know mmm I think we
- 2 should flag this in the description bit in in this because I think they will want to
- 3 know this I guess I personally will want to know it will make a difference <L1 Ar>
- 4 *walla* {or what}?
- 5 (1)
- 6 Bader: so:: what you want from us? what what we should do?
- 7 Fahad: I mean make it obvious and and clear (.) make it known it is a selling

8 point sure
 9 Bader: ooh yes sure but <L1 Ar> *wallah* {I swear by Allah} there is reason for
 10 this {explains the reason}

In this extract, the services department is presenting a new package of services for individuals. Fahad is describing the qualities of the package and how it stands out from similar packages offered by other health insurance companies in Saudi Arabia, while also presenting the leaflet they plan to distribute in hospitals and other venues to advertise the package. Bader stops Fahad to point out that one of the qualities Fahad mentions is not listed in the leaflet. Bader suggests that the quality needs to be emphasized using the word 'flag'. Following a short pause, Fahad shows that he does not understand Bader's suggestion but without asking directly for meaning. Instead, Fahad asks two questions that indicate his non-understanding: 'what you want from us?' and 'what we should do?'. This leads Bader to paraphrase the point he is trying to make starting with 'I mean', which indicates that he realizes that it is a moment of non-understanding and that his utterance contains a problematic element. Bader rephrases his question by replacing 'flag it' with 'make it obvious, clear and known'. Thus, he offers an extensive paraphrase of the lexical item which he assumes is the source of difficulty. Fahad then responds with a prolonged 'oh', which indicates that the paraphrase is successful and that he understands now and can comment on Bader's suggestion.

Meeting extracts 7.4 and 7.5 both represent same-speaker paraphrase following the recipient's overt display of non-understanding. Both extracts contain requests for clarification (explicit in Meeting extract 7.4 and implicit in 7.5), and these requests lead the speakers to paraphrase their utterances using specific, more transparent and simpler lexical items. These findings concur with those of Kaur (2009) on ELF in non-business settings.

By contrast, in cases of misunderstanding, the recipient usually misinterprets the speaker's intended message and responds based upon their own interpretation, which leads the speaker to employ a paraphrase to clarify the intended message for their recipients. This can be further demonstrated in the following extract.

Meeting extract 7.6

Participants: Omar L1: Urdu (Call centre team leader), Salem L1: Arabic (services department accountant/admin assistant)

Setting: Pre-Eid break closing meeting of the corporate services department, 35 participants: 14 Arabic speakers, 21 non-Arabic speakers

- 1 Omar: one more thing Bader aah I think Anwar does not realize and he he does
2 not imagine the amount of aggro which will come from our existing clients <1>
3 which is </1>
4 Salem: <1> wait no </1> (.) you think aah the existing customer will be ok with
5 or::
6 Omar: <loud> NO </loud> I mean exactly the opposite our current clients will be
7 angry and MORE than angry...

The above extract exemplifies the strategic use of paraphrasing to resolve a moment of misunderstanding. The services department is discussing a proposal from the financial department to eliminate one of the costly benefits offered in one of the company's Platinum packages. At this segment of the meeting, most of the participants are engaged in discussing the potential pros and cons of accepting and implementing the proposal in what looks like a brainstorming session more than a meeting governed by clear turn-taking rules (as had been the case in the other meetings I observed). Omar raises the issue of client reaction to the proposal using the word 'aggro', which is apparently not a familiar word in Deema Arabia CoP. Salem seems to be unsure about his understanding of Omar's point, which leads him to interrupt and rephrase Omar's utterance seeking Omar's confirmation of his understanding. Omar then interrupts Salem with a prominent 'no', clarifying the misunderstanding by explaining that his intended meaning is 'exactly the opposite'. Omar then replaces 'aggro' with the more common lexical item 'angry' and then adds 'more than angry' to make the paraphrase more precise so that it delivers a similar meaning to that of the original utterance.

I presented this extract to Omar in a retrospective interview and asked him to comment on his word choice. He stated that he had not thought this lexical item would be problematic.

Extract 7.2

I know it is slang [aggro] I know yeah hmm I don't know we use it normally I mean when we speak Urdu we say aggro I mean in English but we mix it with Urdu so maybe I thought it is understood I don't know I didn't think I think of the word @@@ but Salem thought what I meant is completely different so I knew what I said was wrong and THEN and only then I realized it aaah this word aggro I mean is a problem

Omar also added that he found himself 'in similar situations' at the beginning of his career in Deema Arabia, but he 'learnt to be more understood with time'. It can be argued that this learning process was a result of Omar's lengthy mutual engagement with other members of his CoP, which led him to grow from a novice member into an expert member who is aware of the CoP's shared repertoire of resources and of the need to be flexible in the way language is used in intercultural settings.

Paraphrasing as discussed above contributes to resolving moments of non/misunderstanding and therefore leads to mutual understanding. Other same-speaker strategies do not directly contribute to meaning making, but do help maintain the smoothness of an interaction, and are sometimes used to avoid conflicts. In my data, this application of same-speaker strategies is seen through the use of hedges, which are the focus of the next section.

7.2.2 Hedging

Hedges are commonly used to lessen the degree of certainty and assertiveness of utterances (O'Keeffe *et al.*, 2007). Hedging emerged as a common feature of business meeting language in Deema Arabia. The main purpose it serves is introducing opinions and disagreements in a manner that is not face-threatening to the interlocutors. This can be of great importance considering the significance of the clear power relations that govern business communication, especially in high-stake and manager-subordinate meetings in which the practice of hedging is noticeably more common. Hedging expressions include modal verbs and verbs that indicate modality (e.g. we should, I guess, I think), stance and

restrictive adverbs (sort of, kind of, a bit, just, like), and their equivalents in Arabic in some cases.

Hedges as described above are common in business interactions, but they are somewhat non-existent in relational and small talk in Deema Arabia. This can add weight to the claim that hedges are meant to mitigate potential face threats which, as Koester (2006) claims, are an inevitable feature of business discourse. Face-saving through hedging in subordinate-manager meetings is often performed by subordinates to lessen the effect of disagreement with their managers, especially when the subordinates are questioned about a task they were previously assigned as in the extract below.

Meeting extract 7.7

Participants: Abdullah (Facilities manager) L1: Arabic; Murad (Facilities Admin Assistant) L1: Turkish.

Setting: Facilities unit problem-solving meeting, 6 participants: 4 non-Arabic speakers and 2 Arabic speakers

- 1 Abdullah: LAAA I needed [XXX] three days ago la la la A WEEK ago
2 Murad: I told you I needed the job ex [short form for explanation] the file I don't
3 HAVE the job ex file
4 (2)
5 Murad: I think we did not really go through all all the the:: details we just had a
6 casual chat you:: kind of:: told me about and told me to:: think of it but aah it
7 didn't (.) I wasn't sure you want me to get a start with the:: with the thing
8 immediately
9 (1)
10 Murad: but we HAVE time <1> it's aaah</1>
11 Abdullah: ={looks at Hanaa} <1> update Tariq on this and CC me.

The above extract is taken from a critical meeting to face an emerging problem in the Facilities Unit of HR. The discussion around the situation is very intense, with different meeting participants, overtly or covertly, placing blame on one another and holding one another accountable for the current situation. After a long discussion of how this crisis can be overcome, no consensus is reached. Abdullah, the meeting chair and the unit manager, addresses Murad and asks him about what sounds like a task he assigned for him some time

ago. Murad seems surprised at the shift in the topic and at being singled out by the meeting chair in an already hostile meeting. Murad informs Abdullah that he did not start working on the task yet because he was not given a timeframe, but this leads to a more heated exchange. In line 1, Abdullah switches to Arabic, saying a prolonged /a (no) to add emphasis to his point, and then he repeats the /a later in the same line. Taking an assertive stance, Murad explains why he did not start on the task, stating that he did not receive the required documents. This appears to be convincing to Abdullah, who does not respond to Murad's justification. Murad's turn is followed by a somewhat long pause of about three seconds indicating that both parties are reflecting on the situation. In line 5, Murad takes the turn again in an attempt to lower the tension, adopting a less assertive stance by leading with 'I think' and using the first person plural pronoun 'we' instead of 'you' to indicate that he is not accusing Abdullah (his manager) of being inefficient. He uses another hedge, 'kind of', in line 6 to lessen the certainty of his claim so that he does not add to the intensity of the already difficult situation. Abdullah remains silent while Murad explains his position using *I wasn't sure* in line 7, in what seems like Murad's way of accepting partial responsibility. This is followed by a two-second pause, after which Murad takes the lead again and, using *we* again, explains that the situation is not that critical because they still have enough time. Abdullah does not seem to accept Murad's attempt to resolve the conflict as he interrupts him and instructs his assistant to send the outcome of this conversation to his manager (Tariq) and copy him in the email message.

Not all the instances of hedging are as intense and conflictual as the example above. Most subordinates' uses of hedging with their managers are meant to be face-saving and less confrontational. Hedging can also be a tactic in which a manager addresses his subordinates in a less face-threatening manner by using the first person plural pronoun 'we' instead of distancing themselves from the team (see Handford, 2007 for a discussion on the use of 'we' as a hedge in business discourse). In problematic situations, some of the more supportive managers use hedging in this way not only to create a sense of a team, but also to make sure

they do not single anyone out as being responsible for the problem under discussion. This scenario is exemplified in the extract below.

Meeting extract 7.8

Participants: Tariq (HR executive manager) L1: Arabic

Setting: Urgent problem-solving cross-departmental (IT+ HR) meeting, 12 participants: 8 Arabic speakers and 4 non-Arabic speakers

- 1 Tariq: To be honest guys you sort of misunderstanding or underestimating this
2 [inaudible] we're sitting here we are going aaah we are going in in circles THIS
3 discussion can go on and on and on but we are not going (.) we are not going
4 anywhere if we don't agree on the way out ...

This extract comes from another problem-solving meeting that has participants from IT and HR departments. The call for the meeting was on the same day and, as in the meeting in the previous extract, the meeting participants are discussing what led to the problem and who might be responsible. However, in this meeting, there is a department-versus-department or a team-versus-team dynamic, so the discussion is more complicated. Tariq, the HR manager and the most senior staff member in the room, takes the lead to end the inefficient discussion of what is already known. He does this by addressing the IT staff members saying that they are misunderstanding or underestimating the situation, but he uses the hedge 'sort of' to lessen the effect of the judgment he is making. He follows this by a number of statements starting with *we* to show solidarity, to emphasize team spirit, and to sound less authoritarian.

Hedging in the two examples above does not contribute directly to achieving understanding and meaning making, but it is certainly a means by which potential communication conflicts are avoided. Such avoidance of conflict in general can add to the smoothness of different communicative events and ensure they flow effectively toward achieving the communicative goals and, eventually, the larger business goals.

Hedging is also used to avoid long explanations of specialist concepts or terms to non-specialists. This function of hedging can take the form of using 'kind of/sort of' in introducing and explaining new concepts or answering questions about new specialist terms. Such hedging can be clearly seen in discussions of topics of a highly technical nature, as the extract below shows.

Meeting extract 7.9

Participants: Will (IT services admin) L1: Tagalog; Talal (Executive manager/CEO's brother), L1: Arabic

Setting: IT leading team with executive board to discuss a proposal

- 1 Talal: ah it is like Java Script
- 2 Will: hmm it is kind of between Java Script and Visual Basic (.) more like Visual
- 3 Basic but not really like it

In this extract, Will is explaining a technical item involved in the proposal under discussion. He briefly mentions the programming software he plans to use and explains its benefits over other programming software. Talal then shows that he is following Will's presentation and comments that the program description resembles Java Script. Will does not reject Talal's comment directly. Instead, he gives him a more diplomatic answer, saying that it is 'kind of' between Java Script and Visual Basic, but more like the latter and not even really like it. This reply from Will is in fact a covert 'no, it is not like Java Script', as he explained in the retrospective interview. He explained to me that what he was presenting is exactly the opposite of Talal's interpretation. He was demonstrating the advantages of this software over other programming software (including Java Script) and how it actually differs from them. Using hedging, Will escapes what he describes as an 'unnecessarily long discussion' and also, I assume, makes a face-saving move toward the second most important individual in Deema Arabia.

The above discussion has shown that hedging plays a major role in BELF communication in the business meetings of Deema Arabia's CoPs. The findings here resonate with Mauranen's (2004) finding that hedging is extensively used in academic English. This, in fact, leads to the conclusion that the use of hedging is interesting not only from an ESP viewpoint as a feature of academic English, as argued by Elder and Davies (2006) in their commentary on Mauranen (2004), but also from a wider ELF use perspective as an ELF pragmatic feature that serves as a face-saving strategy (see section [4.3](#) for discussion).

In an Arabic-based context, hedging can also be seen in light of the concept of *musayara*, which is related to an other-oriented, 'humouring', 'conciliatory' attitude that prompts individuals to preserve harmony in social relations (see section [2.7.2](#) for relevant discussion and see also Pölzl and Seidlhofer, 2006). As Pölzl and Seidlhofer argue, *musayara* can involve any conversational strategy of saving face and avoiding conflict, i.e. any manoeuvres which 'enhance commonalities rather than differences, co-operation rather than conflict and mutuality rather than self-assertion' (p. 164). *Musayara* in Deema Arabia, as seen in the discussion above, is expressed through hedges to indicate refusal and disapproval in an indirect way in order to minimize risk of conflict.

Having discussed the most prevalent same-speaker communication strategies used in Deema Arabia BELF interactions, I present in the next section the most prevalent other-speaker strategies used by Deema Arabia's CoP members.

7.3 Other-speaker strategies

BELF users' collaboration to co-construct meaning is the most important feature of BELF communication. Because BELF interactions are predominantly goal-oriented, recipients in BELF communicative events are not passive and do not wait for their turn to respond, especially when understanding is threatened. In such cases, BELF users interject to reach

the desired outcome of a communicative event. They employ two different types of strategies to support meaning making and ensure mutual understanding is achieved: strategies meant to help speakers in moments of word search, such as utterance completion, and strategies meant to show engagement and to signal listenership, such as backchannels. Both types of strategies emerged as characteristics of Deema Arabia BELF communication and therefore are discussed in the following sections. Other features such as explicit requests for clarifications and other-repetition also appear in my data, but they are not as prevalent as utterance completions and backchannels. Due to space constraints, these other features are not to be looked at in this thesis.

7.3.1 Utterance completion

One other-speaker supportive strategy that emerged as a significant feature in the recorded data is utterance completions. These involve an interlocutor completing the utterance of the current speaker, without taking over the speaking turn or changing the topic. Utterance completions are thus not regarded as interruptions but as a form of backchannel (Warren, 2006). In most cases, utterance completions are collaborative and signal the listener's involvement and support (cf. Cogo and Dewey, 2012).

In most cases in which utterance completions occur, if the completion conforms with the intention of the initial speaker, the speaker provides a confirmation after the completion in a third turn. That confirmation can occur either through explicit acceptance by prefacing the third turn with a confirmation marker, or through passive acceptance by not rejecting the completions (see Warren 2006). The extracts below demonstrate both possibilities. However, when the completion does not reflect the meaning the first speaker is trying to achieve, there is always a third turn that rejects the completion.

In some instances of utterance completions in my data, the first speaker does not show hesitation or perform a repetition, though completions are similarly performed as a way of

facilitating and supporting communication. This is what Cogo and Dewey (2012: 147) call completion overlaps (see section 4.3 for relevant discussion). In these cases, completion overlaps are meant to provide an added value to the prior utterance, to show knowledge of the topic, or to elicit more talk. Through completion overlaps, interlocutors exhibit their attentiveness and collaboration. As such, utterance completions are also meant to show engagement and signal listenership and general involvement, which in business CoPs points toward the need for effectiveness in the task-oriented communication.

In what follows, I explore instances of utterance completions which occur while the first speaker is trying to recall a word or buying time to remember what they want to say which initiates the word search sequence. I also show some instances in which the completion signals listenership and engagement and an instance in which the utterance completion offered by an interlocutor is seen in a negative light by the first speaker.

Meeting extract 7.10

Participants: Fahad L1: Arabic (Corporate Services Department Manager), Will L1: Tagalog (IT services admin)

Setting: IT leading team with executive board to discuss a proposal, 18 participants: 8 Arabic speakers and 10 non-Arabic speakers (2 NESs)

- 1 Fahad: we need facts about XXX and then and then we can:: aah
- 2 Will: decide=
- 3 Fahad: =yes facts first and and then decision
- 4 Will: you're right we will update you when we have enough info and FACTS
- 5 @@@

In the above extract, the IT team are discussing the feasibility of accepting a proposal offered by an external IT company to install a certain software for internal communication. To close the meeting, Fahad asserts that the management needs more facts on these items in order to be able to make an informed decision. In line 1, Fahad seems to have a moment of word search signalled through two signs of co-production: the elongation of the word 'can' and the hesitation marker 'ah'. Will notices Fahad's moment of word search and, based on their

earlier discussion, offers a completion to Fahad's utterance. Fahad accepts Will's completion and starts his next utterance with 'yes' and then rephrases his prior utterance using a derivation of the lexical item which Will offered as a completion.

This extract is typical of most of the cases of utterance completions in my BELF data. It contains all the elements that Cogo and Dewey (2012) describe as essential in ELF utterance completion instances (see section [4.3](#) for a discussion of these elements). The next extract further demonstrates the same type of strategy, but with a more culture-specific hesitation marker.

Meeting extract 7.11

Participants: Naser L1: Arabic (HR Assistant manager); Hanif L1: Urdu (HR assistant admin)

Setting: HR quarterly meeting, 21 participants: 12 Arabic speakers, 9 non-Arabic speakers

- 1 Naser: you know what I will e-mail his CV anyway and I will I will say well this is
- 2 his experience and this is his skills and and we recommend recommend him
- 3 strongly and if you:: need him *ya'ani*::
- 4 Hanif: =make an offer
- 5 Naser: yeah make an offer and if it works for them and for us and for him we do
- 6 <L1 Arabic> *nagel kafala ala tool* {sponsorship transfer immediately}
- 7 Hanif: =yeah

In this extract, the meeting participants are discussing the situation regarding their colleague from the department of Claims and Underwriting who has to leave the company because of a certain immigration law, even if temporarily. Naser offers a possible solution, which is to send the employee's CV to other insurance companies that do not provide health insurance services in order to make sure that he does not get a job with one of their competitors. Naser is concluding the discussion of this item, taking the initiative in finding their colleague an alternative post. In line 3, he signals a moment of word search through two different hesitation marks: elongation of the word 'you' and use of the Arabic discourse marker *ya'ani*, which can

serve as a filler to buy time in moments of word search (see section [6.3](#) on code-switching for a detailed discussion of *ya'ani*). Hanif, a non-Arabic speaker, then offers a completion to Naser's utterance, suggesting the next step to what Naser is describing. Naser accepts Hanif's completion and confirms it by prefacing his next turn with 'yeah' and a repetition of Hanif's exact utterance. Naser then continues to explain his suggestion, switching to Arabic using the official term to describe the legal procedure. In line 7, Hanif shows understanding and supports Naser again through an overlapping backchannel. This backchannel from Hanif can serve as a signal to indicate that, in spite of the use of the Arabic legal term, Hanif, as a non-Arabic speaker, understands Naser's message, allowing him to continue his segment. This is further explained below when I discuss the use of backchannels to show support in BELF communication.

In some instances in my data, completions during moments of word search offer more precise lexical items that serve the intended meaning of the first speaker better. This is the case in the extract below.

Meeting extract 7.12

Participants: Tariq L1: Arabic (HR Executive manager), Ben L1: Tagalog (IT services admin)

Setting: The services department's quarterly meeting, 38 participants: 19 Arabic speakers, 19 non-Arabic speakers

- 1 Tariq: [this] has aah its BEAUTIFUL success points but with one big issue if we
- 2 sign with them they will be:: the ONLY ahh agency we can delegate TMS to them
- 3 <L1 Ar> *ya'ani* {meaning} it's hmm it is aaah <1> a bond </1>
- 4 Ben: <1> yeah </1> yeah it is a commitment
- 5 Tariq: it is a commitment it is a Risky commitment and...
- 6

Tariq in this extract is talking about a telemarketing contract the company's board members are considering. He details the advantages of signing this contract and then begins to discuss some of the less desirable items of the contract. He explains that the agency the board is considering would require that the agency be the sole TMS agency Deema Arabia deals with. Aiming to give more details about this negative aspect, Tariq shows that he is trying to find the words that best describe the situation by different means. In line 3, he uses the Arabic discourse marker *ya'ani*, indicating that he is trying to clarify his message. Tariq shows hesitation by saying 'it's' and 'it is' in addition to the clear verbal hesitation markers 'hmm' and 'aah'. He then seems to find the closest word to describe the expected contractual relationship with the agency, which is 'bond'. The hesitation that Tariq shows in his turn and his use of the word 'bond' lead Will to overlap and offer him a possible completion of his utterance. Will gives Tariq a synonym of 'bond', namely 'commitment', which can better describe the contractual relationship. Tariq repeats Will's utterance twice, adding more prosodic prominence and inserting the word 'risky' in the second repetition. Tariq's repetition of his interlocutor's utterance shows that he believes that 'commitment' as a synonym of 'bond' better serves the meaning making, and therefore he accepts it and uses it to continue his segment. It also shows the degree of collaboration between the two CoP members who, in spite of their manager-subordinate relationships, are willing to put aside their own statuses in order to achieve meaning making and get their messages across successfully.

The extracts presented above display the collaborative nature of utterance completion. This is typical of ELF encounters in which relationships are generally harmonious and both parties have similar communicative objectives. However, in the competitive atmosphere of business CoPs, utterance completion can also reveal the rival nature of relationships in a CoP. It can be perceived as an intrusive behaviour and therefore one that should not receive validation from the first speaker even if accurate, as the extract below shows.

Extract 7.13

Participants: Talal L1: Arabic (Executive manager/CEO brother); Said L1: Arabic (Financial accounting manager)

Setting: Executive quarterly meeting, 18 participants: 11 Arabic speakers, 7 non-

Arabic speakers (3 NESs)

- 1 Talal: I have a feeling that he is aaah escaping from making the decision so we will
2 go for it and decide for him (.) wallah in fact we can decide <L1 Ar> *badalo* {instead
3 of him} decide in his place I mean because we HAVE aah
4 Said: a refund clause yes this what I told to Najeeb <1> earlier today</1>
5 Talal: <1> we have a refund clause in the </1> in the SB this makes it ok and and
6 easy for me for for: US to request the cheque before December and also give us
7 enough time to get Loay's final:: ah
8 Said: decision
9 Talal: decision and we will have plenty of time to revisit this issue with Loay anyway

In this extract Talal is talking about his brother, the CEO, who is hesitant to make an overdue decision related to one of the contractors who did not meet the specifications both parties agreed on in the contract. Talal explains that his brother is avoiding the decision making, but the executive team can take the initiative as it does not require the CEO's direct involvement because of the 'refund clause'. The legal term 'refund clause' might not be accessible to most Deema Arabia CoP members, and Talal wants to introduce this uncommon term to the meeting participants. Talal seems to have a moment of word search which is vocalized through the hesitation marker 'ah'. Unlike the extracts discussed earlier, here the word search moment is not signalled clearly through different markers. Nonetheless, Said completes Talal's utterance and also adds that earlier on the same day he told Najeeb (Talal's assistant) about the idea Talal is introducing now. Although this completion serves the same function as the completions in the extracts above, and although it is passively accepted by Talal, who repeats it after Said, this utterance completion does not seem to be welcome by Talal. Although it looks collaborative in nature, Said's completion seems to serve his personal purpose, which is taking the credit of bringing this 'refund clause' to the top management's attention. His utterance completion and explanation suggests that he is trying to overshadow Talal, who is the highest managerial authority present at the meeting at that moment. Talal continues his segment using Said's completion but without prefacing it with a 'yes' or showing any signal of confirmation or recognition as in the above extracts.

In line 7, Talal again seems at loss for words, which is signalled by the elongation of the final sound of the word 'final'. Said offers a completion again which does not appear to be competitive,

as was his earlier completion in this extract. Talal responds in the same way by continuing his segment, repeating Said's completion but without confirming the validity of the completion.

Naturally, like in any other communicative settings, BELF users find themselves in situations where they try to recall a specific piece of information in what appears like moments of word search. This also leads their interlocutors to offer possible completion to their utterances, as can be seen in the extract below.

Meeting extract 7.14

Participants: Anwar L1: Arabic (Financial assistant admin), Steven L1: Tagalog (HR admin assistant), Said L1: Arabic (Financial accounting manager)

Setting: HR quarterly meeting, 21 participants: 12 Arabic speakers, 9 non-Arabic speakers

- 1 Anwar: {pointing at a chart on the screen} marketing 19 million we're gonna increase
- 2 it to 22.1 million to accommodate our aaah <L1 Ar > *Allhumma salli ala Mohamma::d*
- 3 {prayer}
- 4 Steven: the Jazan thing?
- 5 Anwar: <L1 Ar> *la la* {no no}
- 6 Said: no because of Riyadh growth strategy
- 7 Anwar: yes so now there is a big push in Riyadh and as Said said we're planning
- 8 expansion in the capital because...

In this extract, Anwar is presenting a chart detailing the company's expenses for the previous quarter and explaining the expected changes on the same items in the coming quarter. In talking about why marketing expenses will increase in the coming quarter, Anwar struggles to recall the reason. He vocalizes his loss of words, saying 'aaah' and then explicitly shows that he is trying to recall the reason for the expenses increase by saying a prayer that is usually said by Muslims when a person is trying to recall a name or a word and wishes to indicate a need for assistance. Steven, a non-Muslim and non-Arabic speaker, then offers a guess of what may be the reason. Anwar strongly dismisses this saying *la la* (no no). Although rejected, Steven's offer of a possible completion is what makes this extract particularly important because the word search is marked by a culture-specific marker. Steven's understanding of the function of Anwar's prayer is an indicator of BELF's cultural hybridity, taking from the cultural backgrounds of its users (Meierkord,

2002) and the cultural references of the habitat in which it is used (Pölzl and Seidlhofer, 2006). Through their mutual engagement in their respective CoPs, BELF users become experts in the resources available in their CoP's linguistic repertoire, and they are therefore able to respond to culture-specific language use even if they do not utilize it for their own communicative goals. Following Steven's utterance completion, Said, who works in the same department with Anwar and is aware of the information he is trying to remember, picks up on Anwar's clear appeal for assistance. Said also dismisses Steven's guess, though he starts with a 'no', and then provides Anwar with a completion to his utterance. Anwar continues his segment prefacing it with a 'yes' to confirm Said's completion and paraphrases Said's utterance instead of using his exact words.

The above extracts on utterance completion show how BELF users actively work toward achieving their communicative goals. Interlocutors strive to co-construct meaning through various strategies. Another other-speaker strategy that serves the function of interactional support is backchannels, which are the focus of the next section.

7.3.2 Backchannels

Backchannels are the short verbal responses made by listeners to signal they are listening and do not wish to take over the turn (Handsford, 2010). Backchannels are sometimes regarded as a universal principle, as Kubota (1991) more than 20 years ago argued based on the lack of evidence to support cultural differences in the production of backchannel responses (see also Heinz, 2003 for more recent discussion on this). However, one of my participants⁷ (Justin, Canadian participant, L1: Canadian English) stated that he views the need for backchannels as more evident when he interacts with Saudis. When I asked him if he sees differences in the manner in which people from different cultural backgrounds use English, one of the points he mentioned is Saudis' reliance on backchannels. He explained that Saudis need 'signs' to tell them that you are listening, or they will ask you if you hear them or if you understand what they are saying. He then added that these signs can also be facial expressions or nodding.

⁷ Justin is the only NES participant in my research. He did not consent to the recording of the interview and allowed for only note taking.

Findings in general ELF concur with Carter's (2004: 8) view that backchannels are one of the means interlocutors employ to create 'an effective commonality of viewpoint' and assert that backchannels are used to signal interlocutors' solidarity (cf. Cogo and Dewey, 2012). However, the case of backchannels in BELF, at least as my data revealed, is not always as straightforward.

In high-stake meetings, backchannels are almost solely used by senior staff members while they listen to their subordinates reporting on assigned tasks. Backchannels in these scenarios usually take the form of (hmm), which does not offer evaluative feedback but signals to the subordinate to continue and give more information. It can be regarded as a sign of power coming from the manager. The extract below presents an example of this use of backchannels.

Meeting extract 7.15

Participants: Fahad: (Corporate services department manager) L1 Arabic; Ben: (IT services admin) L1 Tagalog

Setting: The services departments quarterly meeting

- 1 Yazan: they basically take out for quarter or or mid year: until the end of the year
- 2 Fahad: hmm
- 3 Yazan: then they take a full year contract (.) you can see it I mean it is available it is
- 4 detailed in the database on your aah=
- 5 Fahad: =yeah right =
- 6 Yazan: =database that they are up for for renewal or or termination in in aaah
- 7 September this this year=
- 8 Fahad: =hmm
- 9 (.)
- 10 Yazan: and then if they terminate we offer the second half with 25% off the quarter
- 11 plan or depending on their previous plans and and other things=
- 12 Fahad: =hmm
- 13 Yazan: they mostly wouldn't <L1 Ar> *in sha Allah* {if Allah wills} (.) more terminations
- 14 happen in December ya'ani around the end of the year=
- 15 Fahad: =yeah
- 16 Yazan: the same like <L1 Ar> *a/* {the} corporate accounts almost

This extract has several backchannel instances in the form of 'hmm' coming from a manager to a subordinate (lines 2, 8, and 12). Fahad is listening to Yazan talking about customers renewing contracts. Fahad, by using 'hmm', makes it clear to Yazan that he needs more information on the topic discussed. Yazan provides more information after each 'hmm', and in line 6 he receives a backchannel (i.e. yeah right) overlapping with his utterance. This evaluative backchannel seemingly indicates that Yazan does not need to explain more, but as soon as Yazan finishes his utterance, Fahad produces another 'hmm'. Considering the short pause after this utterance, it can be said that Yazan is surprised by the backchannel response from Fahad. Yazan then continues explaining his point elaborately, taking a longer turn which is latched by another 'hmm' from Fahad. This leads Yazan to mention a reassuring piece of information about terminating current accounts in line 13, in which he switches to Arabic twice saying *in sha Allah* and *ya'ani* (see Chapter 6 for more details on code-switching in my data). This is followed by another instance of an evaluative backchannel 'yeah' from Fahad, who shows that he agrees or at least understands and does not need more information. Yazan, however, knowing Fahad's previous experience in corporates' accounts, explains that the situation is similar to that of corporates accounts. This apparently leads Fahad to respond with a backchannel that indicates satisfaction with the explanation provided, as Fahad produces the backchannel response of 'oh I see I see', and that ends the conversation. Fahad then turns to another meeting participant and engages in a similar interaction about another item in the meeting agenda.

In my data, backchannels tend to overlap with or latch onto the previous turn (see also Cogo and Dewey, 2012). It can be argued that backchannels are the only form of overlapping utterances routinely tolerated in business meetings, which are governed by clear power relations and specific turn-taking rules as the extract above clearly shows. Backchannels in such scenarios smooth the flow of communication without interrupting the current speaker who can be of a higher position, and thus, backchannels can lessen the need for face-threatening or interruptive utterances.

In peer meetings, backchannels often take place in the Q and A part of the meeting where a meeting participant raises a question and listens to its answer. *Yeah* as a backchannel (as

opposed to an answer to a question) is the most common form of backchannels. *Okay* is also one of the regular backchannels used amongst speakers with different proficiency levels, in addition to several other English and Arabic words that can possibly serve the functions of backchannels as the next extract shows.

Meeting extract 7.16

Participants: Will (IT services department manager) L1: Tagalog; Omar (Call centre team leader) L1: Urdu; Najem (IT trainer) L1: Urdu; Naseem (technician) L1: Arabic

Setting: IT Ramadan working hours allocation, 19 participants: 18 non-Arabic speakers, 1 Arabic speaker

- 1 Will: so when we finish this meeting today we we will have a clear direction to where
- 2 our summer is going but=
- 3 Omar: =lovely=
- 4 Najem: =yeah <LN Arabic> *in sha Allah*=
- 5 Will: =but of course we should be flexible and and open for change of action plan=
- 6 Najem: =sure
- 7 Naseem: =yeah

In this extract, Will is explaining the purpose of the meeting to his team. He is being apologetic about not preparing a clear meeting agenda in advance. When it is obvious to his interlocutors that his turn is nearly over, most of them produce backchannel responses. Omar says 'lovely' in a clear sign of solidarity with Will and as a sign of accepting his somewhat apology as stated above. Concurrently, Najem says *yeah in sha Allah* since the conversation is about future plans and, in this context, *in sha Allah* seems like a natural Islamic backchannel. Will then finishes his utterance (line 5), sounding more affirmative as the team leader. This is also followed by backchannels, but more formal than the ones in lines 6 and 7. Najem says 'sure', which is also one of the solidarity backchannels, and Naseem says 'yeah' as a sign of understanding and agreeing. The meeting then proceeds to discuss the situation for which the meeting was arranged.

In general, the use of backchannels in my business meeting data seems to be in line with the previous research done on ELF interactions (e.g. Cogo and Dewey, 2012; Kalocsai, 2014) and the research on the wider field of pragmatics (e.g. Carter, 2004; McCarthy, 1998).

7.4 Discussion and summary

In my attempt to highlight the most prevalent communicative strategies employed in BELF interactions, my data appear to substantiate previous ELF research findings that stress that ELF talk depends on the speakers' cooperation (cf. Kaur, 2009, 2011; Cogo, 2009; Kalocsai, 2011; Dewey, 2011). As Seidlhofer (2001: 143) explains, 'at the most general level an observation that has been made repeatedly is that ELF interactions often are consensus-oriented, cooperative and mutually supportive'. In this sense, and as has been shown throughout this chapter and in Chapter 6, BELF users skilfully employ different communicative strategies to directly enhance mutual understanding as in the case of code-switching, paraphrasing, and utterance completions; to project linguacultural identities as in the case of some uses of code-switching; and to contribute something positive at the interpersonal level of talk, meaning that they simultaneously create a 'feeling of a shared satisfaction' (Hülmbauer, 2007: 10) and establish rapport as in the case of hedging and backchannels.

These cooperative communicative strategies highlight that BELF interlocutors actively and jointly co-construct meaning which leads to the success of different communicative events, even if that construction takes longer to achieve the desired goal of an interaction. The extracts from the recorded meetings in chapters 6 and 7 further explain and substantiate this argument (see, for example, extracts 7.4 and 7.5). These findings directly contest some of the previous BELF research that claims that ELF speakers have the tendency to 'let it pass' when they are faced with a problematic element in utterance (Firth, 1996; Koester, 2010; Kankaanranta and Planken, 2010). This research, in addition to ELF research, explicates the sophisticated processes with which BELF speakers carefully and skilfully attend to the meaning-making process and negotiate non/misunderstanding. My findings on paraphrasing show that joint efforts for repairing problematic moments emerged in response to the speakers' need to deal with different competencies and experiences (see also Kaur, 2009; Kalocsai, 2011). Additionally, when BELF users in Deema Arabia were in search for a word or facing a moment of a non/misunderstanding, they expected help and relied on their interlocutors for interactional support. This normally led the interlocutors to offer help by contributing to the repair practice based on their linguistic resources, their knowledge in the topic, and their history of mutual engagement. This finding supports Smith's (2010) principal of 'joint forces', according to which ELF speakers engaged in social

practice are willing to bring to the exchange whatever is perceived as interactionally and transactionally necessary to make the communicative event work. The finding also presents evidence from business interactions to counter Firth's (1996) notion of 'let it pass'.

In this chapter, different interactional support strategies are discussed as manifested in my BELF data. Some of these strategies are initiated by the same speaker either to resolve a moment of non/misunderstanding (paraphrasing) or to avoid potential communication conflict (hedging). The other type of interactional support strategies discussed in this chapter are other-speaker initiated. These strategies also serve as signals that indicate listenership and engagement (backchannels) and that assist interlocutors at moments of word search (utterance completions).

Chapter 8 BELF Users' Perceptions on the Use of BELF in the Workplace

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the participants' views and perceptions on the use of BELF in Deema Arabia communities of practice (CoPs). It reports the findings of the thematic analysis of the interview data (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of analytical procedures). I divide the chapter on the basis of the different themes and their related sub-themes that were identified in the analysis of both the ethnographic interviews as well as the group retrospective interview data.

The first theme to be discussed is the participants' views of the use of English in their workplace environment. Under this theme, three sub-themes emerged: English as a business reality, the level of proficiency required for business, and attitudes toward English in the workplace. The second theme relates to the challenges that the interviewees face when communicating in English. There are three sub-themes under this theme: communicating with colleagues with lower proficiencies, communicating with senior members, and fairness issues in relation to recruitment and also promotions. The third theme is communicating with native English speakers (NESs), and the sub-themes are the participants' perceptions of who is a native speaker, and the challenges/benefits of communicating with NESs. In what follows, I explain these themes in turn.

8.2 BELF users' view of English in the workplace

The thematic analysis of my interview data indicates that, in general, my participants accept English as a business reality. They show a pragmatic attitude toward what they perceive as the required level of proficiency for their workplace, but they also express some ideological concerns in regards to having to use English in their everyday business life, as the following sections demonstrate.

8.2.1 English as a business reality

In general, my interviewees show pragmatism in the way they view English as an international business language. English is accepted as part of their business life, and it is perceived as a business reality regardless of its implications. This functional realization can be observed in the responses of the participants across the managerial hierarchy and can be seen in the extracts below. At the highest level of the organization, Tariq, HR Executive Manager, explained how English now is a business reality in his response to my question about whether or not English has an official status as a corporate policy:

Extract 8.1

You mean something like aah a law written? No no nothing like that English is ALREADY the language of international business (.) there is there is no need to make it a aah corporate policy as you: say history and and economy made this reality (.) aah companies <L1 Ar> *ay ay* {any any} company that aah want to do business internationally <L1 Ar> *ya'ani* {filler} hire and and also DEVElop their employees their English language skills

Tariq's statement indicates his implicit awareness of the important status that English has in business today. He stresses the importance of English in the processes of employee selection and development stems from his position as HR manager. Speaking about the use of English from a professional perspective, i.e. based on the interviewees' professional role in the company, is a trend I observed in the responses of some of my participants. For instance, Wesam, a financial analyst, justified the use of English in international business from a cost-based viewpoint.

Extract 8.2

[T]he power of English comes from its capacity to lower the the transaction costs in business in in international business *ya'ani* (.) lower costs is the single motivator for businesses and business people to use a particular language <L1 Arabic> *ala hesab alarabi sawa kan* {at the expense of Arabic be it} English or:: Swahili @@@

The nature of Wesam's professional role as a financial analyst in Deema Arabia is reflected in his description of the power of adopting English as a corporate language as a cost-effective strategy.

Wesam seems to have a clear view on why English is the language of choice in Deema Arabia. His statement links language choice in Deema Arabia to cost reduction directly, which is in itself one of the known business CoP goals (see also Ehrenreich, 2009).

Some of my participants showed deeper understandings of why English is the language of international business today. Najem, IT trainer, demonstrated his understanding of the complexity of language choice in business organizations. He lists the different possible factors that can affect a company's language choice and concluded that English is the language that currently serves international business purposes effectively.

Extract 8.3

[L]anguage choice in business is determined by a range of factors whether institutional or individual (.) it can be companies' size or fields of operations or employees' duties and seniority and many other [...] English I think seems to serve and fulfil most of these factors so the language of choice is mostly English

Other views expressed by some of the interviewees point toward the same direction of the effectiveness of using English. For instance, Adel, corporate services administrator, believed the following:

Extract 8.4

[T]he common platform to understand each other in business today is English, English to make everyone's life easier <L1 Ar> *mo bas henna* {not only here} in the whole world and we are just part of it <L1 Ar> *henna* {here}

Adel's statement above indicates his awareness of the status of English as an international language. Describing the use of English for communication in the workplace as 'the common platform' is also parallel with ELF researchers' definition of ELF in general and of BELF in particular (see sections [2.6](#) and [3.3](#)). Similarly, Fahad, Corporate Services Department Manager, whose bachelor degree is in English and who believes that his high level of proficiency in English

is one of the reasons he was able to 'climb the corporate's ladder', describes English in business as a natural 'operating system':

Extract 8.5

[U]sing a single language as some kind of operating system is a way to do it to go international <L1 Ar> *ya'ani* {filler} hmm yeah that seems natural to me [...] English is ahhh a necessity by many business organizations and practitioners, for whom it is aaah a PART of their everyday professional:: lives <L1 Ar> *ya'ani* {filler} you know

In addition to the above general acceptance of English in the participants' workplace, Hanaa, facilities admin assistant from Syria, also showed enthusiasm toward English as the current business lingua franca. She noted the following reasons:

Extract 8.6

Having <L1 Ar> *zay* {like} one big international language is brilliant <L1 Ar> *hageegi* {really}

The functionality of English as a business language is appreciated by most of my participants. Two of my interviewees compared the importance of English in business organizations to the importance of the internet in terms of necessity and effectiveness.

Extract 8.7

English in business just plays aaah supporting role just like the internet (Wesam)

Extract 8.8

I always say two things made ALL this this globalization of of business possible the internet and English language (Adel)

The above two extracts resonate with Ehrenreich's (2011) participants remark that because of its status as a vital part of the workplace toolkit just like mobiles or laptops, English seems to be exempt from the category of foreign languages as it is 'a means to an end' and 'normal thing as

switching my computer every day' (ibid.: 22). As can be seen from the above extracts, most participants agree on the important role English plays as the current lingua franca in international business. These extracts demonstrate how English is accepted as a fact in everyday business life. This general position amongst the participants reflects what Rogerson-Revell (2007: 57) calls 'functionality' or what Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2012: 265) call 'emergent strategy' to deal with everyday international business communication needs. The position also echoes Seidlhofer's (2003: 57, my italics) argument that 'we have entered an era in which a kind of *functional realism* and pragmatism view seems to establish itself'. Seidlhofer elaborates on this pragmatic motivation for using English as an international language, describing English as both utilitarian, i.e. important for international business, and idealistic, i.e. facilitating cross-border communication and mutual understanding (see also Rogerson-Revell 2007, Ehrenreich 2011).

Having discussed the participants' view of the use of English in their workplace, in the next section, I discuss the second sub-theme, which is the level of proficiency required for the communication to succeed in the workplace.

8.2.2 The level of proficiency required for the workplace

In the data, some of the participants show awareness of the status of English as the business lingua franca. As such, their pragmatic view of English extends only to what they perceive as their business language needs. For example, in response to a question about the level of English skills he believes necessary for the workplace, Adel explains that business communication skills are the main criterion for the employee's English language competence:

Extract 8.9

What's needed is to: obtain [?] a level that helps one's business communication skills

Other interviewees link the proficiency level required for communication success to the achievement of the communicative goals of different communicative events. Majed (claims examiner), for example, stresses that what matters in business communication is 'the exchange of the information' in a 'target-oriented' manner.

Extract 8.10

[W]hat we focus on here is aah the exchange of the information. That enable us to to:: con::DUCT our business in aaah objective and aah TARGET-oriented way <L1 Ar> *agsod lazim kol alkalam yekoon hadeef, fahmatni?* {I mean the talk should be purposeful, do you understand me?}

The emphasis in Majed's extract is on the words 'objective' and 'target' and in his switch to Arabic, which stresses his point about the importance of being 'purposeful'. These three items reflect what BELF research emphasizes. That is, BELF talk is generally purposeful, goal-based and task-related talk (cf. Kankaanranta and Planken, 2010 and see section [3.3.1](#) for relevant discussion). Similarly, Wesam states that nobody pays attention to the linguistic forms if the goals of communicative events are achieved. He describes the linguistic forms necessary to achieve those goals as 'simple' and 'direct', which are exactly the same adjectives of the researchers who coined the term 'BELF'⁸ (see Louhiala-Salminen *et al.*, 2005 and section [3.3](#) of this thesis). He laughingly adds that these linguistic forms can be 'seriously wrong', but errors are ignored if the forms succeed in delivering the intended messages.

Extract 8.11

[Y]ou can use simple and direct English to get things done (.) your English can be @@ seriously wrong but but as long as the goal of your talking is is achieved, no one cares

Majed and Wesam's opinions echo the findings of BELF research. Ehrenreich (2009, 2011), for example, argues that business professionals are subject-oriented speakers who see language skills as subordinate to business goals, which are of the utmost importance. It can be assumed, based on the extracts discussed above, that what underpins these views is the participants' understanding that communication and information flow are fundamental features of business organizations, and that there is a central relationship between effective communication and achieving business objectives. In short, what motivates communication in business CoPs is the realization of the community's joint enterprise. This joint enterprise, which is known and shared by the CoP members, defines what is appropriate in a CoP's shared repertoire in the sense of 'does it serve the purpose it is intended for' (Wenger, 1998: 83). On this basis, adoption of the CoP framework to analyse the use of BELF is justifiable. Knowing the CoP's goals and working

⁸ As has been repeatedly emphasized throughout this thesis, describing ELF/BELF use as 'simple' and 'direct' is *not* in line with ELF research, including in this thesis (cf. Mauranen, 2012).

towards achieving them can inform language choices, leading speakers to accommodate interlocutors' needs in an effort to reach mutual understanding for the sake of achieving those goals.

Wesam also mentions the status of BELF as a cost-effective form of communication. As a financial analyst, Wesam looks at language use and the level of proficiency required in the workplace from a cost-based perspective. He describes BELF as 'shortcuts to learning an entire language'.

Extract 8.12

[O]f course learning aah a language is costly transaction in in itself so yes your idea of shortcuts to learning an ENTIRE language and accepting hmm SIMPLER forms of the: aah English language just for business objectives sounds (2) yeah it seems reasonable and like it or not it is what's now happening

I strived during the ethnographic interviews not to reveal my own views about English and my research objectives. Yet, as can be seen from the extract above, Wesam assumes that I am promoting a certain form of "simpler" English as the ideal mode of communication in business as he refers to '[my] idea of shortcuts to learning an entire language'. Wesam, however, is not the only participant who describes English in business as a 'simplified' or reduced English. Mazin also refers to a similar notion:

Extract 8.13

[A]gain and again <L1 Arabic> *ASHADED* {I STRESS} that that the language we speak here is simplified version which has NOthing to do with English as a aah REAL language

Mazin reinforces Wesam's view of English as the language of communication in Deema Arabia, describing this form of English as different from 'English as a real language', by which he meant ENL, as Mazin explained later in response to my request to elaborate in the retrospective interview. Mazin and Wesam's views in a way echo some of the BELF research findings, especially the findings of the Aalato university researchers who coined the term BELF (cf. Louhiala-Salminen *et al.*, 2005). As explained in section [4.2](#), coming from a business communication background, Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* often refer to BELF as a simplified, direct form of English. Unlike ELF researchers (e.g. Mauranen, 2012), Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* (*ibid.*) do

not acknowledge the complexity of language used in intercultural settings and, therefore, it can be argued, they tend to unintentionally undermine the proficiency of BELF users (see section [4.2](#) for relevant discussion on ELF pragmatics). In the next section, I discuss the relationship between BELF and identity issues in the workplace.

8.2.3 BELF and identity in Deema Arabia communities of practice

The above views reflect how English is accepted as a reality in the business world. However, the views do not reflect how the participants feel about communicating in English in their everyday business life. Some of the interviews led to a discussion of feelings about English as a business language and what it meant for the status of Arabic. When Arabic was brought up, some of the participants who had previously expressed acceptance and appreciation for the pragmatism of English in the workplace somewhat changed their positions. These participants showed discontent with the status quo and explained that having to speak English in their workplace limits their own or their colleagues' professional lives. This shift in the participants' attitudes reveals the complexity of people's beliefs and attitudes. The topic of English as the business language in Deema Arabia was among the topics that dominated the first retrospective interview with the Arabic speakers Hanaa, Mazin, Adel and Bakor (see section [5.6.2.2](#) for details on the use of retrospective interviews in this research).

In the transcripts of the first retrospective interview, Adel (see Extract 8.4 above), for instance, explains that even if he accepts the reality of English being the business language, he is strongly against the use of English in business in a country in which English is not the mother tongue. After asking for my permission to switch to Arabic, he then adds the following in Arabic:

Extract 8.14

[B]y making us speak English the language that is only and basically linked to the rational and and serious workplace environment aah they deprive the company from part of our insights and and our creativity which can be found in other aspects of our lives (.) it is like they are asking you to become and act like someone else and this can make a distance between me and the company (.) not me or not only me, I'm sure many feel this way but they don't say for different reasons (*my translation*)

Adel then switches back to English to add

Extract 8.15

I do NOT speak like this because I suffer with English but because I love Arabic and and because I know that many many of my: aah colleagues suffer

By adding this, Adel seems to want to save his public image by stating that his concerns in regards to English as a corporate language are not personal and that they stem from his love of Arabic, which he seems to perceive as threatened by English. What the transcript and the translation of Adel's statement fail to show is the strong sentiment portrayed in his words. His passion and enthusiasm led one of the quieter interviewees to speak up and share her thoughts on the matter. Hanaa (see Extract 8.6 above) explains that, even though she 'loves and enjoys' speaking and learning English, she wishes that Arabic was the dominant language in her context, especially in critical moments in which she feels her professional image is threatened by her inability to find the appropriate vocabulary or to react in a timely manner. Like Adel, Hanaa also asserts, in an attempt to save her image, that she is not the only one who feels this way.

Extract 8.16

Do not misunderstand me here I LOVE and I enJOY speaking and and also:: LEARning English on the move @@@ [she lists two examples of her learning experience] but like Adel say I SOMEtimes have difficulties in in finding enough or or:: appropriate words for quick reaction in discussion and sometimes this happens in critical situations and and I feel bad and then I wish Arabic was the dominant language here oh I would be the boss of the department (.) I am very bright in Arabic @@@ and wallah I'm sure not only me feel <L1 Ar> heek {like this}

Hanaa's statement led to a discussion of the history of the Arabic language and Arabic literature, during which all four participants expressed their affection toward their mother tongue. However, in terms of English in business, there was a clear dichotomy in opinions in regards to whether English should be accepted and dealt with as a business reality only, or to welcome English in different aspects of life as well. After a lengthy discussion of how Arabic has lost its status and English has taken over in the Arab world, Mazin concludes the discussion by returning to the notion of the pragmatism and functionality of English. He then states the following in Arabic:

Extract 8.17

English is the language of business this is fine by me and by MANY people I guess

[...] the people who think there is a battle between English and Arabic, this is not a worthy debate this is not a worthy battlefield, this is useless [...] the world NEEDS a global language we all need it [...] the business world the media even the food everything is globalized, so definitely it is against our common welfare to be rigid and to refuse these changes and to lock ourselves within the walls of the Arabic language (2) but don't get me wrong I love Arabic and I wish it takes the place of English but I am realistic and I do not see this happening soon so I accept English (*my translation*)

Adel's, Hanaa's and Mazin's statements all show that views about both English and Arabic are linked to larger ideological issues. Adel and Hanaa express their desire for Arabic to be the dominant language but assert that they do accept English in its current role. Mazin, on the other hand, shows his appreciation for globalization and its implications, including the spread of the English language, but he states that he does not want to be perceived as someone who does not love Arabic.

Bakor, the other Saudi participant in this group interview, ends the debate with a statement (in Arabic) that prompted agreement from all the participants.

Extract 8.18

Let's say one can speak Arabic as one's national and personal language and English as one's international business language (*my translation*)

Bakor's statement sums up the role of BELF as 'an integral part of work' (Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen, 2010: 207) and as just a 'tool' in the business people toolkit (Ehrenreich, 2010: 417). It also reinforces Seidlhofer's (2000: 57) statement that 'people need and want to learn English whatever the ideological baggage that comes with it' because the fundamental concerns for the business domain are 'efficiency, relevance and economy in language learning and language use'. Seidlhofer's pragmatic statement is clearly manifested in my participants' view of English in their workplace, as the extracts presented above reveal.

On the basis of this group interview and some of the one-to-one ethnographic interviews, the general trend that can be identified is that non-Saudi Arabs are often more passionate about Arabic and think of English in the workplace less favourably than Saudi Arabs. Nonetheless, a Saudi call centre team member whom I approached after he was suggested to me by his manager because of his 'language issues' expressed a very strong position against English as the language of the workplace, as can be seen in Extract 8.19 below.

Extract 8.19

The foreigners, even if they form a minority, impose their language on us Saudis in our own country. An Indian once said to me “if you want to work with me, speak English please” (2) I think if you are in a country you need to speak their language and not make them change their language for you. I mean we speak English in England, but this is Saudi ARABIA for Allah sake (*my translation*)

In the above extract, Turki shares his frustration about English being ‘imposed’ by ‘the foreigners’. He believes that Saudis are discriminated against in their own country because they are required to speak a language that is not their mother tongue. Turki says that he once qualified for a promotion which he could not get because he does not speak ‘the language of the foreigners’. Turki’s case is further discussed under the theme of fairness in section [8.3.3](#) in this chapter.

Interestingly, a similar position is also expressed by two of the non-Arabic speaking participants who actually benefit from the fact that English, not Arabic, is the language of communication in Deema Arabia. Will, for example, acknowledged that if it was not for his English language skills, he would not have ‘the wealth of opportunities’ that he believes he currently has. However, Will also states that he understands ‘the grievances of [his] Arab colleagues who have poor English’. He then adds that he himself, in spite of his ‘advanced English’, encounters communication difficulties:

Extract 8.20

[F]orcing an all English-language policy on everything done and and everything said in international companies oppress the thoughts that create and and aah INNOvate

This association between language and creativity is mentioned by four other participants. For example, as noted above, Adel states that one of the reasons he opposes the use of English in the workplace is because it ‘deprive[s] the company of [the employees’] insights and creativity’ (see Extract 8.14 above). Haidar, another non-Arabic speaking interviewee, also expresses similar views and asserts that a company’s medium of communication needs to be adapted according to the local context in which it operates.

Extract 8.21

[A]s products you know need to be localized to fit particular local markets I think business companies too need to:: to respond and and to adapt to the cultural

requirements of their of their aah operations so I think insisting that English MUST be the language of communication aaah across the company is unnecessary and sometimes DISRESPECTful to the local culture

As explained in section [5.3](#) on research context and as Extract 8.1 above shows, English is not in any way an official corporate policy. However, most participants talk about the use of English in Deema Arabia as if it were 'forced' on the staff. Extracts 8.20 and 8.21 indicate that the ideological concerns regarding the use of BELF are shared by the participants regardless of their national backgrounds and L1s. The participant views discussed above diminish the validity of the language for identification versus language for communication debate (see section [3.3.5.1](#) for relevant discussion). The participants' ideological concerns about the use of English in their workplace indicate the significance of English as more than just a neutral medium of communication which is used for transactional purposes only (cf. House, 2003).

In this section, I discussed the three sub-themes under the theme of BELF users' view of English in the workplace. In the next section, I discuss some of the challenges faced in BELF encounters as the second major theme emerging from my interview data.

8.3 Challenges affecting BELF communication

National identity is not the only concern my interviewees had in regards to the use of English in their workplace. The challenges that BELF communication poses also emerged as a substantial theme in the interviews. Three types of challenges are especially prevalent in the interview data: communicating with colleagues with lower proficiencies, communicating with senior staff members and addressing fairness issues in relation to recruitment and also promotions. In what follows, I discuss each challenge in turn.

8.3.1 Speakers with lower proficiencies

Some ELF research findings suggest that there is a low proficiency level below which communication becomes impossible or at least very difficult (cf. Kaur, 2009). This finding is also manifested in my interview data as a major challenge some of my interviewees reported that they face. Five of the non-Arabic speaking participants state that they feel frustrated when they have to

communicate with CoP members with low proficiency in English. Speakers with lower proficiencies are identified by the participants as speakers with whom it is necessary to 'spend massive time repeating yourself' (Najem) or with whom they 'need more Arabic than English in the conversation' (Ben). Such speakers are also identified by their perceived unclear pronunciation, as Omar explains during the retrospective interviews:

Extract 8.22

I can ignore whatever language problem if I can understand I mean if I understand what they want to say but if the pronunciation is not clear then THAT's a problem

Omar's statement prompted agreement from the rest of the group in the retrospective interview. Unintelligibility on the phonological level was also mentioned by several other participants, Arabic and non-Arabic speakers, who believe that certain speakers are especially unintelligible because of their pronunciation. Arabic speakers attributed pronunciation issues to certain ethnic backgrounds and accents. Wesam, for example, explains in detail how he finds the English of his Bengali colleague 'funny' sometimes and 'very problematic' at others because of his colleague's 'Indian pronunciation of English'. However, Wesam also asserts that with time his Bengali colleague's accent has become 'normal' to him, even though other people in their team still report that they find it difficult to understand.

The participants' unease with unintelligible pronunciation is not surprising. Prominent ELF researchers have described pronunciation as 'possibly the greatest single barrier to successful communication' (Jenkins, 2000: 83, see also Pickering, 2006). It can be said, however, that through mutual engagement, the challenges posed by unintelligible pronunciation can be mastered, as in the case of Wesam above (see also Ehrenreich, 2009). Further evidence for this potential mastery comes from the numerous instances I recorded in my field notes of conversations that seemed completely problematic to me as an outsider to the CoP because of the unconventional pronunciation of one of the participants in such conversations. In these instances, the participant's pronunciation did not seem to impair the understanding of either of the conversants, which can be probably explained looking at their history of mutual engagement.

Unintelligibility on levels other than phonology does not seem to pose a challenge in Deema Arabia CoPs. Two participants (Will and Omar) did mention grammar-related challenges, but they quickly dismissed such challenges as insignificant as they do not affect mutual intelligibility. In the same retrospective interview, Will states the following about the use of ‘non-standard’ grammar:

Extract 8.23

You can’t help it you notice when someone makes mistake in grammar it can be simple and small but you hear it @@@

Other than these two participants, there was a general agreement on the minimal effect of grammar on understanding the intended messages. This agreement concurs with Meierkord’s (2004) finding that despite some ‘extreme divergences’ from the rules of NS varieties in her ELF data, these divergences do not impede comprehensibility. It also concurs with Jenkins (2000), who argues that grammatical miscues play only a minor role in comprehensibility in ELF interactions.

The non-Arabic speakers described some of the Arabic speakers in Deema Arabia CoPs as having lower proficiencies. This perceived low proficiency maybe due to Arabic speakers’ widespread use of code-switching. As the non-Arabic speakers cannot switch to Arabic, time-consuming misunderstandings cannot be repaired through code-switching. As my data shows, one of the functions of code-switching is to resolve moments of non/misunderstanding. Jaffer, for example, explains how he sometimes involves an Arabic speaker in his conversations with one of his ‘problematic’ colleagues to avoid potential misunderstanding or to avoid lengthy exchanges.

Extract 8.24

[W]hen I speak with [xxx] e.g. oh dea:r it takes AGEs [...] but sometimes I bring along someone to say my my question or:: request in Arabic I mean someone Arabic to:: translate

Jaffer is not the only one to state that there are some encounters that require the presence of a third party for the purpose of mediating and translating. Ben also explains that he has a number of colleagues with whom he cannot ‘simplify’ his English enough to adapt to their needs.

Extract 8.25

[W]ith some of my aah colleagues I ve::ry often find myself in need for someone to explain my point in Arabic (.) but ah this is of course after I fail to simplify my language enough like you know I ask for someone to jump into the conversation to

help us because we both need help you know not only the person I talk to @@@

Ben expresses that the communication breakdown in situations like the above is not a direct result of his interlocutor's low proficiency alone, but also of his own incapability to draw on the linguistic resources available in his CoP. Ben's statement, in fact, highlights BELF users' implicit realization of ELF researchers' belief that meaning is interactionally co-constructed and not speaker or listener centred (cf. Kaur 2009).

Ben then adds that though he does not mind involving an Arabic speaker as an interpreter, this is rather impractical:

Extract 8.26

[I]t takes more people to do something that that need only TWO people I mean:: normally this is not practical time wise and also cost wise you know

Cost is one of the basic parameters against which effective communication in business is measured (cf. Selmier and Oh, 2012). Therefore, eliminating the need for interpretation is often considered in job assignments and task allocations. Tariq, HR manager, explains that in spite of the comprehensive language test that all the job candidates take, the HR management still finds itself in situations where they hire a candidate because of their expertise in their respective field even though the candidate does not score the minimum accepted at Deema Arabia on their English language tests. He gives an example of one of the accountants whose expertise in accounting and dedication to her work are 'excellent', but whose poor English led the management to adjust her scope of work to minimize her contact with non-Arabic speakers:

Extract 8.27

Like [name 1], she is an excellent accountant and really dedicated but her supervisor and our clients the:: non Arabic clients, some of them, have trouble understanding her (.) I found her OK when we hired her but we received a number of complaints about her language (.) so we had to LIMIT her hmm tasks with with the Arabs, because this way we can BENEFIT from her expertise in accounting but also avoiding chances of miscommunication (.) the question is: is it fair to us in Deema to try to match the language level of each of our employees? Like [name 1] for example sometimes hmm she is aaah exempted from certain tasks because of her English language and in spite of that she is paid exactly like [name 2] (.) is this fair for us and for her colleague? (.) certainly not

Tariq explains that Deema Arabia management is adopting an open-door policy to encourage employees to express their concerns about their workplace. Language is such a pressing issue that some employees thought it important enough to bring to the management's attention. Tariq then states that in order to have what he describes as a 'safe' and 'harmonious' workplace, communication should be 'flawless':

Extract 8.28

[W]e are adopting Open door policy here in HRM we encourage people to come and talk about their their issues and their problems at work (.) many times the issue was language <L1 Ar> *mathal'n* {for example} if you do not understand your boss language or the other way around (.) we do transfers based on this like we transfer someone from department to department for this reason it happened not many times but it happened (.) flawless communication is a MUST for business (.) it is key to:: SUCCESS <L1 Ar> *taba'an* {sure}

Although the management perspective articulated by Tariq above seems positive and shows support toward employees who have difficulties in communicating with their colleagues and managers, concerns in relation to communicating with less proficient speakers are still apparent. Two of my interviewees state that they avoid oral communication with some of their colleagues who are known to be lacking proficiency in English. They both prefer written communication in such cases. Najem, for example, speaks about how he communicates with one of his colleagues whose English is 'bad' in Najem's terms.

Extract 8.29

I think writing in [name] case can resolve this aah issue (.) so if I write an email to [name] I do not have to explain for long because I know he will hmm look for someone to interpret it and this way we both of us can avoid the embarrassment (.) and and also If I meet [name] on my way to here and he stops me to ask about something I pretend to be in a hurry and ask him to email me instead likewise

Will also suggests written communication as a more effective way of communicating with speakers with perceived lower proficiencies in the retrospective interview. He states that he has encountered some cases in which 'poor English' led to miscommunication because the information conveyed was 'incorrect or misleading'. Once, for example, a lack of mastery of English tenses 'almost' led him to miss a deadline, but he double-checked in time and avoided what otherwise would have been a 'disaster' to his career. Will states that this incident made him

always rely on exact dates and times in written format and got him into the habit of 'double-checking'.

Another issue that Omar notes in the same retrospective interview, and one which received agreement from the other three participants, is Arabic speakers' direct translation of idiomatic expressions from Arabic to English, with the expectation that the expressions are comprehensible to their non-Arabic speaking interlocutors.

Extract 8.30

Some Arabs translate idioms for example and local expressions from their culture to English and then spend massive time to explain them to me @@

This topic led to a lengthy discussion of how Arabs appreciate their language and expect non-Arabs to appreciate it too and how Arabs constantly strive to translate Arabic songs and poetry to non-Arabs expecting the same appreciation for the language in return. The participants all had humorous encounters with Arabs to report.

At the end of this retrospective group interview with the non-Arabic speakers, Will shows an empathetic outlook to communicating with colleagues with limited proficiencies, but he believes it is hard to stay empathetic in practice.

Extract 8.31

We need to be sympathetic we need to help our co-workers through their difficulties INclu:ding communication difficulties (.) it can increase the chances of effective communication and their learning skills because someone maybe feels that that he is in in aaah unsupportive work environment, he may be frustrated and then begin to look for other job opportunities it is true I know in practice this is HARD but it is necessary (.) I think yeah

This statement from Will incited agreement from two of the other participants. The two participants conclude that the challenges they discussed earlier are only 'rare occurrences' (Omar) and can be easily overcome. This conclusion reinforces the usefulness of adopting the framework of CoP in studying situated BELF communication. It demonstrates how the Deema Arabia CoP members strive to exploit the shared repertoire available to them in the realization of their joint enterprise, which is the primary focus of their CoP. It also demonstrates how everything else, including

language forms, are secondary. In the next section, I discuss the challenges some of my participants face while communicating with senior staff members.

8.3.2 Communicating with senior staff members

In communicating with CoP members with lower proficiencies, interviewees describe the basis of difficulty as intelligibility. In contrast, in communicating with members at the higher level of the organizational hierarchy, interviewees describe the basis of difficulty as face-related issues. Mohyee, for example, speaks about his struggle with English in his daily business life but stresses that his worst struggle is communicating with his manager and with the top-level management in general.

Extract 8.32

If you speak good English you will be able to respond quickly and appropriately giving your boss the impression that you are smart and thorough and you help to resolve the problem (.) but if your English is weak your tongue will be tied you just won't be able to contribute (.) sometimes you just keep talking and talking and you see the people they are trying to make sense of what you are saying and they are lost and then you are lost too @@@ this is not a laughing matter though because sometimes it is really embarrassing (*my translation*)

Mohyee is Moroccan. His L1s are Moroccan Arabic and French. His previous work experience was in France and his home country where, he claims, English is not as widely used as it is in Saudi Arabia. He believes that his English 'limited abilities' are a result of his francophone education, in which English is not given the same importance as French. In spite of Mohyee's view of his limited abilities in English, many of his proficient English-speaking colleagues express the same concern. Ibtehal, for example, also states that her basic concern with English is not being able to respond adequately and appropriately in 'critical situations':

Extract 8.33

I sometimes hmm have difficulties in finding enough or aah APPROPRIATE words for quick reaction in aah <L1 Ar> *taarfi* {you know} discussion and sometimes this happens in critical situations and I feel bad

In order to find out more about what Ibtehal finds specifically challenging, I asked her about what she meant by 'critical situation'. She explains as follows:

Extract 8.32

Ya'ani situations which include people from the eighth floor @@@

As explained in section [5.3](#) on research context, the executive managers' offices are located on a separate floor – 'the eighth floor' – so Ibtehal's reference here is to the upper-level management. Like Mohyee and Ibtehal, Mazin states that encounters with the upper management can be generally stressful in nature, and communicating in an additional language can add to the stressfulness of these encounters. Mazin states that when communicating with the top management, he feels monitored and tested constantly. He also refers to the power element in such encounters and how language reflects power relations:

Extract 8.33

[I]t is like when you know they monitor aah <L1 Ar> *ya'ani beykhtabrook ala tool* {meaning they testing you all the time} your performance <L1 Ar> *shaklak* {your appearance} and of course your language too so when you make mistake it is not like when they make mistakes (.) you just feel you are less and less powerful

Challenges of this nature, i.e. relating to communicating with senior staff members, are recognized in BELF research, but not fully addressed. Based on the fact that this type of challenge is experienced by three of my participants, and considering the significant existence of CoP members with lower proficiencies (discussed in section [8.3.1](#)), it can be argued that this challenge can be a frustration sensed by a considerable number of Deema Arabia CoP members. This will be further elaborated in the next section which addresses fairness issues in relation to BELF.

8.3.3 Issues of fairness

Another concern some of my participants expressed in relation to English in their workplace is the issue of fairness in terms of recruitment and in promotion opportunities. This concern is mainly shared amongst Arabic speakers, but some of the non-Arabic speaking participants also show awareness of the importance of English as a criterion that is considered in promotions. Najem, for example explains:

Extract 8.34

English language and and aah communication become part of people jobs and

careers (.) something they may be rewarded for (.) so it can give competitive edge to to the good speakers which is not fair for all honestly

One of my pilot interviewees, Saleh, states that 'knowing English very well' is not only a prerequisite for promotions, but also a necessity for business life after being promoted. This is because the level of proficiency in English required for communication elevates as it approaches the top of the organizational hierarchy.

Extract 8.35

One of the reasons I wanted to learn English was because if I want to be promoted I cannot sit in a meeting with executives without knowing English very well because most of the deals and the high level management speaking English very well almost like native [...] if I want to be promoted on upper level of the hierarchy of the company you have to speak English very well in order to communicate and deliver your message and spread your word or you will stay at the lowest level even if you are the best in your:: area

Turki is perhaps the participant who displays the strongest case in which English is seen as an impediment to career advancement. As briefly discussed in section [2.1](#) above, Turki believes that his promotion was denied because he does not speak 'the language of the foreigner'. Thus, he concludes, if it were not for English, he would be working in a company much larger and more prestigious than Deema Arabia. Some of his previous job applications to large international companies were also rejected because of his low proficiency in English. Turki states that he applied for a job in another international company with 13 other Saudi candidates, but none of them was hired because of their 'weak' English. He found later that the position had been filled by an Indian expat, which he views as evidence of 'discrimination against Saudis in their own country'. As for his promotion in Deema Arabia, he states the following:

Extract 8.36

I do not speak English I do not speak their language not the way they speak it at least (.) I will not be part of their power wars or or part of the office politics I cannot compete at that level so I stay at this level where my language can be enough (.) and they still do not believe it is enough even here in the call centre (*my translation*)

An additional injustice Turki believes that he faces is being excluded from paid training courses which are taught in English inside Saudi Arabia and abroad. This is, he believes, one of his strongest frustrations in regards to English.

Extract 8.37

[M]y colleagues travel the world and take different training courses and they only let me apply to the ones in Amman or in Cairo why? because of my English language (*my translation*)

He also states that he feels frustrated when he prepares a substantial amount of work and then must give it to someone else to present it in meetings because this person speaks English better. He concludes with a very strong statement that sums up his lifelong struggle with English:

Extract 8.38

[T]hey do not understand that I suffer (.) I suffered when English was a school subject and I suffer now in earning my daily food (*my translation*)

Although Turki's case is extreme and seems to be exceptional, his sentiment seems strong and most of his colleagues report that they are aware of his language-related difficulties. Fairness issues, although not that commonplace, can be frustrating to those who suffer from them. Considering Turki's case, in addition to the reported challenge of communicating with senior staff members discussed in section [8.3.2](#), the difficulties of using BELF in the workplace can be seen as a serious matter that can create a sense of frustration in those who suffer from it; and, as a result, can affect the overall quality of communication in the company. As discussed in section [3.3.5](#) on BELF users' perceptions reported in previous research, Charles (2007) contends that if this sense of dissatisfaction is felt by a large number of the employees, it can be disturbing to the general organizational environment. Charles explains that language is a very personal thing; if people face situations where they feel deprived of their ability to communicate and express themselves adequately (as also seen in Extracts 8.14 and 8.20), there will be a sense of frustration and a struggle to maintain dignity which will ultimately affect their personal productivity and, eventually, reflect on the organization's overall productivity. Therefore, addressing challenges in BELF communication is paramount if we want our research findings to be of value to the fields of business communication and teaching English for specific business purposes (ESBP) which will be further discussed in section [9.3.2](#). In the next section, I discuss the last major theme emerging from my interview data, which is NESs in Deema Arabia CoPs.

8.4 Native speakers of English in Deema Arabia's communities of practice

Some of my participants reported experiencing difficulties while using BELF in communicating with native English speakers (NESs). Based on the interview data, this difficulty seems to be twofold, as NESs usually occupy positions in the higher levels of the organizational hierarchy (see section 8.3.2 above on communicating with senior staff members). The challenge sometimes relates to the manner in which some NESs tend to speak English, as explained in detail in this section. It is important to note here that by referring to NESs generally, I do not intend to depict all NESs as a monolithic entity. However, I find it appropriate to use the term in its general sense, as has been the norm in ELF research⁹.

NESs appeared in my interview data under different themes. One of these themes is the challenges of communicating with NESs, which usually leads to a discussion of the participants' perceptions of who is a native speaker, a discussion which constitutes the second theme. Both themes are discussed in following sections, in addition to the input from the only native speaker in my data.

8.4.1 Challenges of communicating with native speakers

The first theme in which NESs are considered significant is in discussion of the difficulties encountered in using English in the workplace. NS English is often described as 'complicated' (Hanaa) and 'harder to understand' (Saleh) for several different reasons. In general, my participants' views on NS English align with ELF literature findings on the intelligibility of NS's English in ELF contexts (cf. Sweeney and Zhu, 2010; and cf. Kolocsai, 2009). In the pilot interview transcript, Saleh explains why he finds NESs' English the hardest to understand.

Extract 8.40

[T]he native [is the hardest to understand] basically because they use idioms and such a hard word (.) Chinese is a little bit hard because of their accent sometimes. But I can say the native are a little bit harder to understand

⁹ It is important to acknowledge that there has been considerable debate about the nature of native speakerness in WE and ELF literature (see section 2.3 in this thesis for details).

Saleh is one of my pilot study participants, so his input may not be relevant in the context of Deema Arabia, especially because Deema Arabia staff do not have any Chinese members. Nonetheless, Saleh's position was shared by some of my participants from Deema Arabia. However, there is a clear discrepancy between this common view in the interview data and the actual use of BELF in the recorded meetings. In these meetings, there is no evidence of NESs' use of culture-based idiomatic expressions. This discrepancy or lack of evidence may be due to the fact that my recorded interactions were from business meetings solely, as stated earlier in different sections. Meetings are generally formal in nature, and therefore the use of idioms and culture-based expressions is less commonplace than in other less formal and less structured settings. Even in the few instances in which idiomatic expressions were used in meetings, the idioms seemed to be unproblematic to the meetings' participants, and they were used by NNESSs). The concerns which the participants express then can be related to their everyday interactions with their NES colleagues or managers.

A participant from Deema Arabia, Majed, responds similarly in Extract 8.41 below to my question about what he finds particularly challenging about NS English. He explains that he sometimes finds difficult NESs' use of what he calls 'language devices' (*my translation*). To elaborate, he mentions NESs' use of 'metaphoric expressions', and he particularly reports an incident in which he encountered his NES manager's use of metaphoric language. Majed asked his manager to support a certain application he submitted to the HR. (This application was about a critical, urgent personal issue Majed did not want to share with me during the interview). His manager unenthusiastically promised to do what he could, ending his promise with the expression 'but don't hold your breath'. Majed states that he could tell that the intended meaning of the expression 'is not positive' based on the context of his manager's metaphorical expression. However, Majed also states that this expression was confusing, and therefore he could not respond to his manager's statement immediately. Majed then adds:

Extract 8.41

They [NESs] assume because we speak English that we speak it with the same cultural baggage that comes with it (*my translation*)

Another concern that some of my participants express in regards to NS English is the speed at which NESs speak. Ibtehal, for instance, lists her challenges when she tries to take minutes in meetings which include NES participants:

Extract 8.42

<L1 Ar> *Menshan koon adla* {to be fair} I don't know if they [NESs] understand Arabic accents, but my impression is that hmm they speak too fast and and with a VERY strong accent (.) when I try to take meetings' minutes, <L1 Arabic> *mathalan* {for example} I just can't write anything down because I can't understand them (.) I have to ask later for details from my colleagues who speak better English like native

Ibtehal is the CEO's secretary and personal assistant, and therefore she is in constant contact with NESs as part of the executive team. In executive meetings, Ibtehal is usually the person who takes the minutes to be circulated after the meetings. To answer my question about how she finds communicating in English with NESs, she starts by stating that her Arabic accented English might not be understandable to NESs, and therefore the difficulty can be mutual. She states that NESs speak 'too fast', which is also a prevalent impression of NESs among other participants, though their concerns are discussed later in this section. She also asserts that NESs' 'very strong accent' can be problematic, a view which is not common amongst her colleagues, who show admiration for NES accents. This appreciation is also discussed later in this section.

Adel comments as well on NESs' fast rate of speech, saying (in Arabic) that NESs 'eat up words' and 'reduce words to the basic sounds only'. NES pronunciation, he states, posed a challenge to him only during his early encounters with NESs; he eventually 'got used' to their NS pronunciation. Adel adds that NESs are 'understanding' and 'do not mind slowing down for those who are weak in English'. This last statement, in fact, is evidence of NESs accommodating NNESSs, which is contrary to some of the research findings (cf. Sweeney and Hua, 2010). Ibtehal and Adel are not the only participants who comment on the speed at which NESs speak. This concern is a common trend in my data which resonates with earlier findings in BELF literature (cf. Louhiala-Slminen *et al.*, 2005).

As for the other side of Ibtehal's description of NS English having 'a very strong accent', Ibtehal seems to be the only participant who is critical of NES accents. When I asked her what she meant by 'accent', she could not elaborate, but she gave me names of two British board members as

examples of heavy NS accents. Ibtehal's position puts her in contact with all the NESs in Deema Arabia. Therefore, singling out participants coming from the same native background may suggest that her struggle is with British varieties of English. Unlike most of the other participants, who state that they overcame their communication difficulties over time, Ibtehal asserts that her struggle with NS English is persistent and has not lessened despite her constant contact with NESs.

Aside from Ibtehal, and in spite of the reported difficulties of communicating with NESs, there is a general appreciation of NESs' accents in Deema Arabia, particularly amongst some of my Saudi participants. Tariq, the HR Executive Manager, for example, adds the following during a description of how 'bad English' can negatively affect business:

Extract 8.43

I know you say but your English is not perfect @@@ but at least I admit it and and I try to develop it (.) but at least I have good American accent right?

Saying this, Tariq here indicates his awareness of my status as a linguist and, therefore, he attempts to save his face by stating his awareness of his 'not perfect' English. Describing his English as 'not perfect' but then claiming that he 'at least' has a 'good American accent' demonstrates the prestige he assigns to NS varieties of English, or to American English to be specific. Tariq then asked me about my preferences in terms of native accents. I tried to explain my ELF stance on native accents without giving him second thoughts about his earlier statement saying that I am more familiar with the way English is used in my school in London. What he perceived from my answer to his question is that I prefer British accents.

Another Saudi participant, Fahad, also shows a preference for NS English. He explains that he evaluates his own English in the following way:

Extract 8.44

I can say almost like native but <L1 Arabic> *wallah* {swearing by Allah} sometimes people think I'm native or they ask me 'you lived in the states?' it's a nice compliment @@@

Tariq (Extract 8.43) and Fahad (Extract 8.44) show their preference of native accents by claiming they speak with one. Other participants (Bakor and Mazin) state that they wish they had learned English earlier in their lives, as this would have helped them to acquire a native accent. This is one aspect of their English language that they comment on wanting to improve to help their business communication. Both Bakor and Mazin refer to native accents vaguely, but when asked to specify, they both state that they love American English, although Bakor reports that he does not mind a British accent if it is the only option.

The participants' aspirations to have a native accent indicate that even though BELF is the functional mode of communication in Deema Arabia, it is not necessarily the target or desired model of English as an additional language for the participants themselves. It should be noted again that this appreciation of NS accents is a trend observed in the responses of my Saudi participants only. No mention of NS accents occurs in any of the data gathered from my non-Saudi participants.

Another concern that two participants express is that some of the NESs speak with a low voice (in comparison to their NNES colleagues), which compounds the difficulty of understanding their speech. Ibtehal, for example, continuing her response on what she finds particularly hard in communicating with NESs (see Extract 8.42 above), explains as follows:

Extract 8.45

<L1 Arabic> *Mo bas heek* {not only this} native speakers are very quite <L1 Arabic> *marra* {very} you don't know if you don't understand or or you don't hear aah <L1 Arabic> *kuwais* {well} @@@

Like Ibtehal, Waseem also expresses a similar view of what can make NESs hard to understand:

Extract 8.46

[S]ometimes you feel like they are talking <L1 AR> *ma'a hallon* {to themselves} they are whispering almost *ya'ani* (.) it make you angry @@@

What Ibtehal and Waseem describe is an observation I also made with some of the few NESs I encountered during my fieldwork. This was even clearer to me in the meeting recordings, as some of the NESs' utterances during the meetings were less audible than those of the other

meeting participants. This, in fact, was frustrating to me as a researcher as well because it made the task of transcribing more difficult and also minimized the chances of finding suitable exchanges between NESs and NNEs for the sake of interactional analysis. In many cases, the inaudibility of some NESs led to clarification requests by their NNE interlocutor, and non-understanding in these instances is repaired by the first speaker's (the NES's) repetition of their original utterances but in a louder voice or with a paraphrase (see section 8.5.2 below for a NES perspective on this).

Although written communication is deemed easier by the majority of my participants, e-mail correspondence with NESs also seems to pose a difficulty for some of them. Three of my participants indicate that email messages written by NESs can be culturally unacceptable. This concern is style-based and reflects cultural discrepancies between the different participants. Waseem, for instance, explained how in business communication 'the human dimension' is usually overshadowed by the need for 'achievement'. However, Waseem states that NESs tend to 'ignore tone' more than their NNE colleagues. He singles out two NESs as examples.

Extract 8.47

[name 1] and [name 2] write the worse emails they TOTALLY ignore tone ya'ani I used to think <L1 Ar> *inno* {that} they are angry ya'ani when I read their requests by e-mail but <L1 Ar> *baadeen* {then} I noticed <L1 Ar> *inno henna heek yehko a'adi* {that they talk like this normally}

Another participant, Najem, also states that NESs he works with write emails 'directly to the point'. He finds this 'acceptable' but not 'ideal'. He then singles out one of his NES colleagues who, as Najem describes him, tends to write 'blunt and tasteless' emails. However, Najem shows understanding of this NES colleague's behaviour because of what he describes as 'the need for speed' in business. The need for effectiveness, 'achievement' (Waseem) and 'speed' (Najem) in business communication is one of the features that often defines business CoPs and therefore governs communication within it (see also Ehrenreich, 2009). Although Waseem and Najem show understanding, their comments suggest that this NES style of writing emails can be improved and still be effective. Because these remarks come from two participants from different cultural backgrounds (Pakistani and Jordanian), it can be argued that it is a valid concern. Even if this style of NES performance eventually leads to achievement of the required tasks, it is challenging

for some of their NNEs colleagues to deal with requests that come in forms such as those described by Waseem and Najem. These comments can also be taken as evidence that NESs, as some ELF researchers argue, are not necessarily very adept at intercultural communication (See also Sweeney and Hua, 2010).

The above discussion covers the concerns that my participants encounter when communicating with NESs. Nonetheless, communicating with NESs was seen as advantageous by some participants. Will mentions that his weakness in English in recent years is a direct result of communicating with people with lower proficiencies. He explains that because of this, he feels less confident when talking to NESs, adding that he benefits from projects in which he is teamed up with a NES because it constitutes a chance for him to improve his English. This perceived benefit of improving one's English by communicating with NESs is also expressed by Maha and Fahad. Maha explains her long history of working with NESs in her previous workplace and then comments on how she improved her English by communicating with them without having to pay for schools that import NES teachers.

Extract 8.48

[Y]a'ani people pay thousands to study in schools like [school name 1] and [school name 2] because they have native teachers (.) but if they are in the room next to you, you learn from them by only doing your job @@@

Maha's statement above suggests that she considers herself a learner as opposed to a user of English. This is in stark contrast to BELF literature, which argues that the learner status is irrelevant in business environments (cf. Ehrenreich, 2009 and Louhiala-Slminen *et al.*, 2005). Although BELF is the dominant mode of communication operating in Deema Arabia, some of my participants assert that they want to improve their English with the ENL model being the desired target model. This trend, although expressed by a limited number of participants, also challenges some of the findings in ELF/BELF research that show that a NES model is seen as unnecessary and unrealistic by business people professionals (cf. Ehrenreich 2009; Hülmbauer, 2008). This finding is also reaffirmed by my only NES participant, as the next section shows.

8.4.2 Views of the native speaking participant

As explained in Chapter 4, only one NES member of staff, Justin, met me for an interview.

Because he did not give consent to record his interview, his input here is based on the notes I took during the interview. Before we started the interview, he asked me extensively about my research and asked me to clarify certain terms such as 'lingua franca'. This gave me a good lead to start the interview by asking him about his feelings about having his mother tongue as the lingua franca of the world. He states the following:

Extract 8.49

I breathe a sigh of relief because English is the language of business and trade and because there is no indication of this changing anytime soon @@

This 'relief' is not always positive, as Justin added that there is a downside to this worldwide spread of English. He talked extensively about NESs not learning an additional language, describing NESs as 'lazy' for not taking 'the foreign language challenge'. He also explained how he is 'amazed' by his NNS colleagues for being able to spend their business days speaking a 'foreign language'. He added that he appreciated the effort of learning foreign languages and he makes sure to show this appreciation to his NNS colleagues and subordinates. (Unfortunately, I did not have access to the department in which he works and therefore cannot verify his statements on showing appreciation to his NNS colleagues).

To elicit his views on English as used in Deema Arabia CoPs, I asked Justin if it is any different from English as used in Canada. His prompt reply was, 'oh totally'. He explained that in his early days in Deema Arabia he felt 'somehow language handicapped'. This is because his English was not always understood by his Arabic colleagues and vice versa. He was 'surprised' to see how much his NES colleagues were able to understand and how communication was 'normal', and this realization led him to believe that he is the person with the problem or, as he described himself, the one who was 'language handicapped'. His awareness of his NNS colleagues' need for accommodation is in parallel with the findings of BELF research in terms of the reported NES awareness of their own unintelligibility (cf. Rogerson-Revell, 2007).

I asked Justin how he managed to overcome his communication difficulties, and he explained, in great detail, how he coped with his CoP's communicative environment. Unfortunately, due to not recording the interview, I cannot present his very telling response with the same preciseness he displayed while talking to me. To paraphrase, Justin stated that he shows awareness of his NNEs colleagues and that he makes modifications to his English when he deals with them which seems to contradict previous ELF/BELF research finding that NNEs are generally inconsiderate users of BELF (cf. Du-Babcock 2007; Rogerson-Revell, 2008; Sweeny and Hua, 2010). The modifications Justin makes include speaking slowly and clearly and avoiding 'running words together'. This indicates that he is aware of the fact that NNEs can have difficulty in processing NNE utterances at their unmonitored speed, as reported in the previous section on the challenges of communicating with NNEs. He also stressed the importance of repetition in his communication, which is a repair strategy that has received broad attention in ELF literature (cf. Kaur, 2009). Repetition, according to Justin, is especially important when his interlocutor asks for a clarification. He explained that originally, when asked for repetition, he only repeated what he had said louder and clearer. Often, this action leads to better understanding. However, he also stated that he came to learn that louder repetitions do not always work, as the problem can be in his word choice. Accordingly, he has started to change 'a few words in the sentence', i.e. to paraphrase, in order to get his meaning across. He stated that with time, it becomes easier to determine what is needed to achieve communication.

Before meetings with his colleagues or subordinates, Justin stated that he insists on circulating a meeting agenda to the participants in order for them to prepare and to avoid 'unpredictable discussions', which can be a reason for miscommunication. He also explained that when he encounters 'bad English', he tries to get the general meaning and 'take guesses'. Eventually, he 'got used to not understanding everything' he hears if it is not 'imperative' that he understands the exact details in an utterance. He reported that he has also learnt to become cautious before agreeing to things that are not 'communicated effectively'. In cases where there is a pressing need for 'precise communication', Justin asks an Arabic speaker to mediate, either as an interpreter or as a guide to confirm his understanding, depending on the criticality of the situation. He explained this as part of a confession that his 'communication skills are inadequate in demanding situations'. Justin also stated that he 'suppresses the temptation to correct' his interlocutors. He realizes the

effort they put into learning the language and admires them for that, and therefore he does not use his native knowledge of the English language to his advantage or to the disadvantage of his colleagues.

I asked Justin if his communication skills have changed during the course of his work in Deema Arabia. He stated that he has become patient in the sense that he allows his interlocutors some time to translate and 'process' in their minds, and therefore he accepts 'silences' in conversations. He also reports that he has become a better listener in general, which he believes is hard work. He also got into the habit of 'explaining [his] ideas at length' and then asking his listeners to repeat what he said to check their understanding, which suggests that he is engaging in good intercultural communication habits. Justin stated that he uses 'visual aids' such as PowerPoint and charts to help in 'speeding up' understanding and communication in general. Justin's utilization of visual aids to support language comprehension is compatible with the CoP model description of a community's shared repertoire of linguistic, symbolic and material elements as resources for negotiation of meaning within the community (see Wenger, 1998; Ehrenreich, 2009).

Like Will and Omar (see section [8.3.2](#) above on the challenges posed by speakers with lower proficiencies), when verbal communication with some of his subordinates with lower proficiencies is difficult, Justin prefers written communication. With the help of 'co-workers' and 'spell-checkers', Justin believes written communication can be 'time-efficient' and 'less awkward' than face-to-face communication.

Justin also revealed that some of his colleagues showed admiration of his English. He stated that some people wanted to befriend him in order to learn to speak like him. For example, an Arabic speaker at one of the highest levels of the company's management once said to him, 'I want to be able to speak like you', which he found surprising yet 'undeservingly flattering' (see section [8.4.1](#) above for Saudi participants views on NS English).

One advantage of working in Deema Arabia that Justin mentioned is that he became familiar with other varieties of English. As he explained, before working in Deema Arabia, he was competent only in Canadian English, although he could understand and recognize British and Australian English with ease. Justin claimed that after joining the Deema Arabia team, his knowledge of British English, Indian English and Filipino English has expanded. He considers this knowledge valuable to him because his next career destination is in Dubai, where there are considerable Indian, Filipino and British minorities.

Justin was my only NES participant, and he might not be a typical NES, especially since he is the only one who took the time to read my project's information sheet and showed interest in the research topic. Judging from Justin's claims of how he communicates with his NNES colleagues and the description of the accommodation strategies he uses, it can be argued that the portrayal of NESs in ELF literature (cf. Sweeney and Zhu, 2010) as less able to employ accommodation strategies is not always accurate. Being monolingual, NESs may not have access to the same linguistic resources as their NNES counterparts and, therefore, cannot utilize certain accommodation strategies such as code-switching (see Chapter 6 for extensive discussion of accommodative code-switching). However, like their NNES counterparts, through mutual engagement in their CoP, NESs become attuned to the communicative needs of their colleagues and can accommodate them using the resources available in their CoP's shared repertoire (e.g. visual aids), and using some accommodation strategies (e.g. clarification checks and repetitions). It is therefore important to review the overgeneralized conception of NESs in ELF literature. In the next section, I look at how some of my participants define NESs.

8.4.3 Who is a native speaker of English in Deema Arabia?

Discussion on NESs often led me to ask participants about how they define a NES, especially when interviewing a participant who is a very proficient speaker of English, or who comes from a country with a nativized variety of English (e.g. India and Pakistan). The general trend shows that my participants reserve the label for the speakers who are conventionally labelled as native speakers, i.e. those from Kachru's (1985) Inner Circle. In more than one case, NESs are ethnically defined. The labels 'Caucasian' (Mazin) and 'white' (Bakor) are used in the group

retrospective interview, although these labels are dismissed by another participant (Hanaa) in the same group as irrelevant. Hanaa's rejection of ethnicity as a parameter in language use is strongly adopted by Adel, who states (in Arabic) that 'race is a dead classification and has no effect on language'. He then dares the other interviewees to compete with his Chadian friend who, according to Adel, speaks Arabic better than Arabs and who has a certification in Classical Arabic from the Holy Mosque Circles, which are known to be very hard to be accepted to and even harder to pass successfully.

Two of my participants who come from India assert that English has been an essential part of their lives. They explain that English is manifested in their subconscious use of the language, e.g. in thinking and dreaming, yet they do not describe themselves as native or even nativized English language speakers. Omar, for example, explains as follows:

Extract 8.50

I can say English is a big part of my life I even catch myself thinking in English sometimes but I would not count myself as a native speaker aaah I would keep this description for those those who learned English as their first and ONLY language I mean those learn it from birth from their parents

Similarly, Jaffer, who comes from India and describes his English as 'indistinguishable' from his British colleagues, states that he cannot confidently call himself a native speaker of English.

Extract 8.51

I cannot remember how I learned English, I never remember translating from Urdu to English, I have British English accent indistinguishable from my British colleagues. I think in English and I:: DREAM in English, but I do not claim that I am a native speaker of English (.) not with confidence at least no

I then asked Jaffer whom he would describe as a native speaker of English:

Extract 8.52

[a] person who GROWS up with the language of a native English speaking country and and have done all their schooling in English and (.) yeah this basically

This led me to ask him if he thinks his colleague, Noori, who has British citizenship and who was born and brought up in Birmingham, is a native speaker of English. Jaffer explains as follows:

Extract 8.53

@@@ this is complicated hmmm I see it this way he [Noori] is native comparing to me and you and and people of Deema Jeddah headquarters but not comparing to NATIVE native speakers @@@

Even though he does not state this clearly, Jaffer's rejection of the description of his Pakistani/British colleague as a native speaker reflects that Jaffer, like Mazin and Bakor, defines the term ethnically. This seems surprising to me since Indian English is one of the long-established and most extensively researched nativized Englishes. The above extracts obviously challenge all the efforts of the WE researchers and linguists who have strived for the recognition of the Englishes of previous colonies as legitimate native/nativized varieties of English. Jaffer and Omar's statements show that there is a mismatch between the academic field, in which ideals about language use are promoted, and the people who actually use these languages. These two participants seem to want to distance themselves from the label of 'native speaker' in a way that indicates that they see English as a property of the speakers who are ethnically defined as white and come from the countries that are conventionally labelled as native speaking countries (Inner Circle contexts). However, when I asked Jaffer if this was the case, he explained that he sees Noori as a NNES because English is not Noori's 'primary language', as Noori speaks Urdu in his 'intimate family time'.

Omar and Jaffer both reject the label of their own English as native as well, even though they report that they use English unconsciously without having to translate. However, some participants state that NESs are defined by this particular feature, i.e. their ability to speak English without having to translate from their first language to English before speaking or when they hear someone speaking English, regardless of their race or where they come from. Hanaa states that this is how she defines herself as a native Arabic speaker:

Extract 8.54

<L1 Ar> *Shoofi* {look} Arabic is my native language my my first language right? <L1 Ar> ana ashoofo inno {I see that} Arabic is your native language if you:: can listen to it and just UNDERSTAND it without translation in in:: your head and <L1 Ar> te'rifi {you know} English the same case

Additionally, participants define NESs by the ability to utilize the cultural references of language use. On this basis, a native speaker is seen as someone who is able to use and grasp culture-based slang, idioms, and humour. Omar elaborates on this, suggesting that as a NES,

Extract 8.55

[Y]ou would catch humour and and manners I mean manners which require language behaviour like like requests and and apologies and stuff I mean you grasp it without blinking (.) you would also know proverbs and folktales etc. and use them in conversations like normally you know?

Understanding vernacular varieties of English, or what Mazin calls 'street English', as used in the linguistic artefacts and the ability to shift footings from what he calls 'good English' to 'street English' are seen as defining features of NESs.

Extract 8.56

Native speakers can speak good English like like college English and also street English like hmm like in hip hop and rap <L1 Ar> *elli ana ma rah agdar atalamou law mot* {which I won't be able to learn even if I die for it} @@@

This, according to Mazin, is one aspect of English that he would not be able to master. Looking at section 4.1 above, Mazin is one of the two participants who state that they wish they had been given the opportunity to acquire a native accent at an early age. He believes that his aspiration to be native-like cannot be realized for the reasons discussed above. Interestingly, defining NESs on the basis of NS cultural use of the language is one of the reasons NS English is often considered harder to understand in Deema Arabia (see Extracts 8.40 and 8.41 above). In general, the extracts of both Arabic and non-Arabic participants indicate that there is trend in Deema Arabia to see NESs as those coming from the countries that are conventionally labelled as NES countries, i.e. as those from Kachru's (1985) Inner Circle.

8.5 Discussion and summary

In this chapter, I displayed some of my participants' statements on how they perceive intercultural communication through BELF in Deema Arabia as a Saudi MNC. As explained in section 8.2 above, my participants showed general acceptance of English in their workplace environment. However, in spite of this acceptance, the challenges were recognized and spoken about extensively. These challenges are intrinsic specifically to the use of English as a business

language; they are not just general challenges of business communication. It is surprising that BELF research does not address these challenges more fully. In previous BELF research, there has been an emphasis on the functionality of BELF and its indispensable role in business communication in MNCs. Although this thesis confirms such findings (section [8.2.1](#) above), it also highlights the challenges that BELF brings into a workplace (section [8.3](#) above). This study will ideally make management more aware of these challenges, so the challenges can be recognized as an area for development. Such development, in turn, could enhance the quality of communication in Deema Arabia and lead to the overall satisfaction of the company's staff. Hence, studies like this one are highly important not only for the field of applied linguistics, but also for the field of business communication, which is concerned with alleviating the quality of business communication processes (cf. Chaney and Martin, 2011). The fact that English is the number one language of business communication is long established. Therefore consulting BELF research in addressing business communication difficulties seems essential.

Ehrenreich (2011) states that none of her German interviewees wanted to return to a German-only workplace again in spite of the challenges English brings to their workplace. In other words, the participants enjoyed their multinational work environment to the point that their satisfaction with the environment outweighed their concerns about BELF challenges. Some of my participants, however, wished that Arabic was the language of communication in Deema Arabia, as discussed in section [8.2.2](#) above. This desire can be related to two of the characteristics often attributed to Arabic speakers. The first is the claimed appreciation of their mother tongue and the value they assign to it. As Bentahila (1983: 135) argues, Arabs believe that Arabic is 'something valuable in itself, not just a means of communicating ideas'. This claim was somewhat validated by some of my non-Arab participants who, during the retrospective group interview, unanimously agreed that Arabs highly appreciate Arabic and expect others to do as well (see section [8.2.2](#) for details). The second characteristic is the face notion, which is often claimed to be a reason why Arabs avoid asking for clarification and showing non-understanding. Concerns over face-related issues are reflected in participants' discussion of the challenges they face when dealing with colleagues with lower proficiency levels and when communicating with people at higher managerial levels. Protecting face, both for oneself and for others, is apparently one of the ways communicating in BELF can be challenging. As several participants explained, some of the meaning-making strategies known in ELF communication are less desirable (e.g. asking for

clarifications). The analysis of the recorded meeting language shows that, contrary to what the participants said, Arabic speakers do engage in processes of negotiation of meaning and can lead a lengthy exchange of turns until mutual understanding is achieved in the same manner previous research has demonstrated that ELF users do. Additionally, face issues have been reported in BELF research as present in different parts of the world (cf. Charles, 2007), and therefore, the claims that face issues are emphasized in intercultural settings that involve Arabs seem inaccurate. Face-related challenges need to be discussed in relation to ELF/BELF use in general and not on the basis of the specific cultural backgrounds of the speakers.

In Chapter 2, I discussed some of the claimed difficulties of Arab intercultural communication which employs English as a medium of communication. Interestingly, none of my non-Arabic participants raised concerns that echo the findings of the reported research (see section [2.7.2](#) for relevant discussion). As explained in section [2.7.2](#), the research that looks at Arabs' intercultural communication patterns adopts a deficiency perspective on non-ENL speech. Therefore, unlike ELF/BELF research, this body of research tends to report the potential 'problems' that are likely to occur when Arabs use English. In fact, my findings not only diverge from findings of research adopting a deficiency approach, but also present evidence that contradict them. Adelman and Lusting (1981) for instance, claim that Arabs use 'misunderstood intonation and syllable stress patterns', which can sound aggressive; but as has been seen repeatedly throughout chapters 6 and 7, added phonological prominence and stress can in fact help in meaning making by making the stressed lexical items/syllables stand out (cf. Meeting extracts 6.5 and 6.6 in this thesis and Pickering, 2009). Adelman and Lusting also claim that Arabs, in contrast to NESs, have a tendency toward exaggeration and the use of differing organizational logics. Interestingly, none of my non-Arabic participants, including the NES, spoke about having such difficulties during communication with Arabic speakers through BELF. During the ethnographic interviews, I specifically, but indirectly, asked about the difficulties of communicating with Arabic speakers of English. The participants' input on this subject lends no support to Adelman and Lusting's (ibid.) or to Zahrana's (1995) findings. Most of the issues raised were cultural based, such as difficulties in terms of dealing with female colleagues and communicating about sensitive issues such as religion and local traditions.

Zahrana (1995), who did his research in business settings, makes sweeping claims on the basis of survey questionnaires (see section [2.7.2](#) for relevant detailed discussion). He claims that, to Arabs, achieving precision is not as important as creating emotional resonance using language. He concludes that for the Arab culture, emphasis is on form over function, affect over accuracy and image over meaning (ibid.). Again, my findings, like other BELF research findings, contradict these claims and assert that form is of secondary status in BELF communication, be it in Arabic or English. The discussion of the level of proficiency required for BELF communication to succeed (see section [8.2.3](#) above) presents evidence that, in business communication, functionality and effectiveness are of paramount importance and any suggestion that form precedes function seems unfounded and unreasonable, especially in business CoPs.

My findings also depart from previous BELF research findings in the value assigned to ENL by my participants. In BELF research done in other contexts, as Ehrenreich (2011) explains, the place of NS English in the language hierarchy and the relative status of NESs is determined by the corporate organizational structure as well as by other business-related aspects, such as the organization's external international links, whether its headquarters is in a non-English speaking country and what positions NESs hold, in addition to the history of an organization's going international which also affects participant's sense of self and their attitudes. In my research, the mother company is located in an English-speaking country (UK), which obviously implies constant contact with NES auditors. Moreover, most NES employees hold positions on the higher levels of the company's organizational hierarchy, which clearly adds to the pressure of communicating with them (see sections 8.4.2 and 8.5.1). Ehrenreich (2011) claims that NS presence exerts an unwelcome pressure towards conforming to ENL norms. This pressure is also seen in my data, but as explained in section [8.4.1](#), this effect is maximized and presented as more of a challenge than just 'an unwelcome pressure'. Additionally, two of my participants asserted that they would like to develop their English in a way to make it resemble NS English (see section [8.4.1](#)), which markedly contrasts with previous BELF research findings that argue that emulating NS (cf. Louhiala-Salminen *et al.*, 2005) is not an aspiration among BELF users. Although this attempt to emulate NESs is not at all seen in the participants' use of BELF in business meetings or while they are immersed in their everyday business tasks, this admiration of NES varieties expressed by some of my Saudi participants (Extract 8.43 and 8.44) and commented on by my NES

participant (section [8.4.2](#)) needs to be acknowledged to stress the importance of contextual factors in shaping BELF users' attitudes.

In this chapter, I have looked at the themes that emerged from the ethnographic interviews' data analysis. I started by presenting my participants' pragmatic views of the use of English in their workplace and then discussed their attitudes toward it. Next I examined the challenges my participants reported as difficulties in their daily use of English in the workplace. These include communicating with speakers with lower proficiencies, communicating with senior staff members and addressing fairness issues. I finally looked at Deema Arabia's NESs' English from their NNEs colleagues' perspectives and from an NES's perspective, and then I presented how some of my participants define who a native speaker is.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This thesis investigated the use of business English as a lingua franca (BELF) in Saudi multinational corporations (MNCs). It has drawn on both emic and etic perspectives through linking together a number of different data sources including ethnographic interviews, recorded interactions and observation data. Based on these different data sets, this chapter aims to answer the three research questions of the thesis in section 9.2. After answering the research questions, I discuss some of the theoretical and practical implications of my findings. Finally, I discuss the methodological contribution my thesis can add to ELF research.

9.2 Research questions

In what follows, I summarize what I perceive as the answers to my research questions based on the discussion of findings in chapters 6, 7 and 8.

9.2.1 What functional roles and status do Arabic, English and other languages have in Deema Arabia as a Saudi MNC?

One of the major goals of my research was to identify how different languages interplay in a Saudi MNC that uses English for business communication. Section 6.2 in Chapter 6 answers this question in detail. To summarize, Deema Arabia CoPs adopt English as corporate language even though doing so is not stipulated in any written corporate policy. Arabic, the language of the habitat of the majority of the CoP members, is the language used if no non-Arabic speaker is present. Other languages, namely languages of the major subcommunities, are also part of the CoPs' multilingual repertoire.

These languages interplay in Deema Arabia's everyday communication, be it business communication or relational talk, as explained in Chapter 6. Although each language seems to play a certain role, the cultural hybridity originating from the different L1s of the CoP members is a pragmatic property manifested in BELF communication. The discourse practices originating from

Arabic, such as small talk traditions and fatalism, seem to be the most prevalent ones in Deema Arabia CoPs.

9.2.2 What are the salient communicative strategies in BELF talk in Deema Arabia as a Saudi MNC?

While the presence of a multitude of languages in any setting promotes resourcefulness, it can also raise some communication problems. This has been the argument of most of the intercultural communication research done up till now. One of the goals of this research was to respond to Poncini's (2002) call to look at what makes business intercultural communication work as opposed to what makes it fail (see section [3.3.4](#) for relevant discussion). Through the analysis of the recorded business meetings in Deema Arabia, I aimed to find out how, in spite of the linguacultural diversity typifying communication in MNCs in general and Deema Arabia in particular, intercultural communication through BELF is possible and even successful.

The answer to this question is discussed in detail in the code-switching sections of Chapter 6 and in Chapter 7, which looks at the communicative strategies that contribute to the success of BELF communication in Deema Arabia CoPs. In Deema Arabia CoPs, with applicability to other contexts, negotiation of meaning through different communicative strategies is a micro-level mechanism. It appears to be a necessity and a top priority for participants in BELF communication. It is motivated by a range of goals, including maintaining the interactional flow, achieving communicative effectiveness, seeking approval, reaching agreements, building rapport and solidarity and developing identities. The need for these communicative strategies in BELF intercultural communication is great, considering the variability in linguistic and cultural backgrounds (cf. Hua, 2015) and the emphasis on communication effectiveness to get the job done.

Although BELF users in Deema Arabia CoPs utilize a variety of strategies to enhance mutual understanding and to add smoothness to interactions, some of these communicative strategies were more prevalent than others. Code-switching, which is discussed in detail in this thesis (theoretically in Chapter 4 and analytically in Chapter 6), proved to be the most important communicative strategy extensively utilized in Deema Arabia. Code-switching in Deema Arabia CoPs is used to serve different communicative functions such as accommodation,

inclusion/exclusion, emphasis and signalling of cultural identities. My analysis also revealed that BELF users employ other strategies to enhance mutual understanding. Paraphrase of problematic elements in an utterance is used both as a pre-emptive strategy and as a repair strategy. In my data, paraphrase is often a strategy utilized by the same (first) speaker to repair a prior utterance, and therefore, I discussed it under the label 'same-speaker strategies'. This is not intended to indicate that paraphrase is used only in this way, but to highlight that this is the manner in which it is employed in most of the paraphrase instances in my BELF data. The other same-speaker strategy that revealed itself in the BELF data is hedging. Hedging in Deema Arabia, as section [7.2.2](#) illustrates, is employed to avoid face-threatening acts and to smooth interactions, especially the ones that involve interlocutors from top-level management.

The other set of communicative strategies is what I label 'other-speaker strategies'. These strategies are often employed by the interlocutors as a means to assist the current speaker where there is an implicit or explicit appeal for assistance or to show understanding and signal listenership. These strategies are utterance completions and backchannels. Utterance completions can be used as an attempt to help the current speaker in moments of word search and consequently can lead to co-constructing understanding (e.g. Meeting extracts 7.10 and 7.11) or they can take the form of completion overlaps to signal engagement and listenership (e.g. Meeting extract 7.14). Backchannels, on the other hand, are always used to show engagement and listenership.

9.2.3 How is intercultural communication in BELF perceived in Deema Arabia as a Saudi MNC?

Chapter 8 of this thesis provides a detailed analysis of the ethnographic and retrospective interviews in an attempt to answer this research question. On the basis of this analysis, it can be said that, generally, BELF users in Deema Arabia have a positive attitude toward the use of English as a medium of communication in their workplace. This positive attitude is manifested either as acceptance or, in some cases, as enthusiasm. The participants also seemed to agree on the level of proficiency required for business communication to succeed. Their views concurred with findings in previous ELF/BELF research that linguistic 'correctness' according to ENL norms

is not necessary (cf. Ehrenreich 2009; Hülmbauer 2009). What matters in BELF communication is effectiveness and achieving the goals of communicative events, even if this happens at the expense of linguistic form. While discussing the attitudes toward the use of BELF in their workplace, some of my participants showed some concerns of an ideological nature. That is, they expressed that communication through English somewhat threatens their linguacultural identities, which they felt are better expressed through Arabic.

My participants also spoke extensively about the challenges they face when communicating through BELF. These challenges included communicating with CoP members with very low proficiencies. Such interactions either require a third interactant who serves as an interpreter or are threatened by the possibility of non/misunderstanding which might lead to costly consequences. The second challenge some of my participants discussed is communicating with senior members of their CoP. Finally, a number of participants discussed the fairness issues raised by adopting English as the medium of communication in Deema Arabia and other MNCs in Saudi Arabia, especially in processes of recruiting, selection and promotion.

Finally, some of the issues raised in the interviews are related to native speakers of English (NESs) in Deema Arabia. The discussion of NESs in Deema Arabia involved discussion of the challenges of communicating with NESs. These challenges included NESs' use of idiomatic expressions and the speed at which they speak. The second NES-related theme is the discussion of how participants define NESs on the basis of their ethnicity. Finally, the views of the one NES participant were discussed in detail in section [8.4.2](#).

A predominantly qualitative ethnographic approach was adopted to investigate the above questions. This approach allowed for producing a rich description of English language use and intercultural communication in Deema Arabia CoPs. I selected this approach as it suited my research aims and questions and provided the chance for holistic multilevel analysis that allowed for the emergence of new areas of investigation and units of analysis as the research progressed.

9.3 Theoretical and practical implications

The review of BELF literature in chapters 2, 3, and 4 and the discussion of my findings in chapters 6, 7 and 8 lead to some theoretical and practical implications that can inform both future BELF research and ESP teaching practices as the two following sections show.

9.3.1 Theoretical Implications

As has been said repeatedly throughout this thesis, ELF/BELF research, including this study, has called for reconceptualization of some of the long-established concepts in sociolinguistics, SLA and ELT research (e.g. competence, speech community). This thesis too has some implications for future BELF research, especially in regards to the categorizations of Saudi Arabia in Kachru's concentric model and Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's (2011) Global Communicative Competence model, as the next two sections discuss.

9.3.1.1 Saudi Arabia and Kachru's model

In Chapter 2, I raise the question of the possibility of the existence of an English with a GCC flavour. Given the influence of Arabic as an official language of the wider context of the study (see section 6.2 for detailed discussion) and the diverse ethnic composition of the Gulf area (see section 2.4 for detailed discussion), it can be said that the unique language mixture has facilitated a version of English specific to the GCC states, and in particular to Saudi Arabia. As Chapter 6 describes in detail, Deema Arabia CoP members use code-switching between Arabic and English and other widely used L1s extensively and undisruptively. They also adopt some linguacultural features from their L1s and use them skilfully for different purposes such as features related to small talk and religion. As Schneider (2007: 312) hypothesizes, 'all varieties of postcolonial English are the product of a uniform process of identity driven accommodation'. This accommodation is clearly seen in the use of BELF in Deema Arabia (see Ehrenreich, 2011, 2015 for application of Schneider's model in BELF). This is not to say that the use of BELF or ELF in Saudi Arabia is a variety in the making. Such an assumption would go against the very concept of ELF fluidity, which is a property inherent to ELF contexts. Rather, the existence of this accommodation should raise questions regarding some of the previous classifications of English use in the Expanding Circle contexts, namely that of Kachru's (1985). Although the model has

been helpful in accounting for the use of English worldwide and in promoting World Englishes as legitimate varieties of English and as a research paradigm, the way this model conceptualizes the use of English in Expanding Circle contexts is lacking to say the least. Thirty years after this model was introduced, it can be argued that it is outdated to account for the contemporary situation.

First, listing Saudi Arabia as an example, Kachru (1992: 5) labels Expanding Circle use of English as 'norm-dependent'. Based on my research findings, his labelling seems baseless. Looking at the discussion in chapters 6 and 7, BELF use in Deema Arabia is mostly endo-normative and does not in any way depend on the norms of Kachru's (1985, 1992) Inner and Outer circles. With the exception of the minor effect of NESs on code-switching practices in Deema Arabia, which can be seen in different lights as discussed in section [2.3](#), NES norms do not guide the use of English in Deema Arabia's oral communication. Additionally, considering the number of expatriates in Saudi Arabia in general (see section [2.4.2](#)) and in Deema Arabia in particular (see section [5.3](#)), assuming unified patterns of acquisition and lists of functions of English in any context – inner, outer or expanding – seems flawed and detached from the complex realities of today's globalized societies. This model seems like an over-simplification of multi-layered and multifaceted communities. Therefore, I echo the reported criticism of this model (see section [2.3](#)) and argue that the main significance this model still holds is the convenient labels it brought into the literature that facilitated descriptions of the sociolinguistic realities of the different contexts in which English is used. The need to adopt an alternative to Kachru's model seems great, and to date, the most suitable alternative is the one provided by the ELF and Global Englishes paradigm.

9.3.1.2 The Global Communicative Competence model revisited

In chapter 4, I discussed the global communicative competence (GCC) model as a multidisciplinary approach to competence in BELF communication which can be helpful in raising awareness of the requirements of communicative competence for modern-day business professionals working in global contexts. The GCC model consists of three layers: multicultural competence, competence in ELF and the communicator's business know-how.

As evidenced throughout the discussion in the three findings chapters, Deema Arabia's CoP members have adequate sociolinguistic and discourse competence to function in the intercultural environment. This is seen in the participants' 'sensitivity towards different ways of doing things' (Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta, 2011: 248) in spite of the cultural differences. The discussion of non-Muslims' use of religious expressions in Deema CoPs points toward the importance of this competence. This is in line with and indicates the importance of Baker's (2008) Intercultural Awareness (ICA), which stresses the role of context-specific knowledge and cultural frames of references in intercultural communication. Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) also assert that competence, to any extent, in more than one language increases this multicultural competence and increases the communicator's intercultural awareness. This was also evident in my data, at least in terms of rapport building as seen section [6.3.10](#) on code-switching to build rapport and show solidarity.

The second level of competence in the GCC model is competence in ELF. Like general ELF researchers (e.g. Cogo and Dewey, 2012; Kaur 2009; Seidlhofer 2011), Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) argue that competence in ELF seems to be different from the long established notion of 'competence'. The users of BELF are skilled at making use of the situation-specific core of the English language. Meanwhile, these users employ specialized and shared terms adapting to the language required in each business situation based on the shared repertoire of their CoP. This also means that competence in BELF communication should include the elements of strategic competence and pragmatic competence which are present in Hymes's (1972) communicative competence. ELF contexts demand an awareness of the need to explicate messages using different communicative strategies such as the ones discussed in chapters 6 and 7. As this thesis shows, and in line with ELF and BELF research findings, successful BELF users switch codes, paraphrase, complete utterances and exhaust all the available resources (linguistic and otherwise) in order to co-construct understanding.

Third, and unique to BELF CoPs, the outermost layer of business know-how and management skills is vital for GCC. Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) position this layer as the overall surface of the model, given the fact that the layer is an integral, inseparable part of

communicative competence. Adding to this layer of competence in the GCC model, my findings point toward the importance of specialties at the business know-how level of the GCC model. As my data reveal, one of the features that characterizes BELF use in Deema Arabia is the high degree of professional specialization. This finding indicates that there is an emphasis on business terminology in general and on professional expertise in particular. As such, BELF specialization in Deema Arabia CoPs is based on a hierarchy. That hierarchy starts with general business terminology which must be accessible to all employees. Knowledge at this level is ensured through the written and oral English language tests that all employees have to take at the recruitment stage, as explained to me by the HR executive manager. The next level in the hierarchy is knowledge of insurance-related terminology which is shared by specialist departments (e.g. claims and underwriting and finance) and by heads of departments. Knowledge of insurance-related terminology is also a requirement for the customer services representatives, as they need to be able to make informed statements when dealing with their customers. This level of knowledge is usually assessed during the first round of job interviews. The top level of BELF specialization is department-related knowledge of terminology (e.g. IT, HR). This level of knowledge is also examined in the initial job interview. The existence of these different levels of knowledge points toward the existence of different CoPs within the larger CoP of Deema Arabia, as explained earlier. Deema Arabia employees need to be experts in the shared repertoire of their respective department CoP, in addition to being familiar with the shared repertoire of the main Deema Arabia CoP. Although these different levels of specialization are intrinsic to the use of BELF as exhibited in Deema Arabia, previous BELF research tends to refer to specialization passingly and vaguely (e.g. Kankaanranta and Planken, 2010; Koester, 2006, 2010). Meeting extracts 6.9 and 6.10 in Chapter 6 on code-switching, in which a representative from the finance department explains the concept of 'reinsurance' to the employees of the HR department, demonstrate the importance of acknowledging different levels of specialization. In the next section, I elaborate on how this model and BELF research, including this study, can inform the practice of teaching English for specific business purposes (ESBP).

9.3.2 Practical implications

One of the questions that ELF researchers often face is related to the teachability of ELF. Until recently, ELF researchers have tended to present descriptive research without fully addressing

how their findings can inform the practice of ELT¹⁰. It seems that the need to address this pressing question has heightened both criticism of and attention toward ELF as a phenomenon and as a research paradigm. Therefore, the *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca* (JELF) dedicated its special issue (edited by Ehrenreich and Pitzl) on March 2015 to 'Teaching ELF, BELF, and/or Intercultural Communication?'. This is in addition to Bayyurt and Akcan's edited volume *Perspectives on Pedagogy for English as a Lingua Franca* published in early 2015. In the next section, I briefly discuss some of the points raised in these publications combined with implications based on my research findings.

9.3.3 Implications for teaching English for specific business purposes (ESBP)

Although the dichotomy between learners and users is stressed in any research that examines BELF use and attitudes, in this section, I discuss how my research, and BELF research in general, can inform the practice of teaching business English to potential BELF users. Although, as Pullin (2015: 49) argues, 'we cannot teach BELF per se', findings from this research and other BELF research projects give us rich insights into the ways in which English is currently used successfully in international business communication and intercultural contexts amongst a wide variety of interlocutors. Yet the practices of ELT and ESP still seem to be detached from the realities of the English language as used in ELF/BELF contexts and remain largely 'norm-centered' (Dewey, 2015: 121).

Dewey (2012: 143) asserts that 'discussions about the pedagogic implications of ELF have to be directly related to teachers' perceptions of what counts as good practice'. This cannot be more true than in the case of business English teaching. As Ehrenreich (2009: 147) argues, business English trainers normally have mainstream ELT backgrounds, and they 'generally do not have a history of socialization into business CofPs'. She rightly adds that for business English trainers to be able to deliver effective and truly customized training, they first need to 'learn from learners as it were' (ibid.), familiarizing themselves with the highly contextualized communicative practices of their respective workplace. Based on my personal experience as a business English teacher in a

¹⁰ Notable exceptions are Dewey (2012) and Walker (2010).

Saudi-based university, I argue that business English teachers and teaching materials can benefit from BELF research findings. Just like materials designed for teaching general English, business English teaching materials are based on traditional representations of NES speech communities and linguistic norms. One of the ways business ESBP materials seem to be flawed is the way in which they address culture-related practices (see, for example, *Market Leader: Business English Course Book* authored by Cotton, Falvey and Kent). As Angouri (2010) explains, the teaching materials used in business English classrooms tend to conceptualize culture as ‘macro-level observations of differences between different cultures where the term typically refers to different nationalities’ (p. 208) and ‘fail to capture the dynamic and increasingly complex nature of discourses’ (p. 211). This is also the case for books that address intercultural communication in general (e.g. Chaney and Martin, 2011). As discussed earlier in this thesis, this concern becomes especially clear in the discussion of ‘culture’ and cultural stereotypes in Saudi Arabia (see section [2.7.2](#) for relevant discussion). Relying on cultural stereotypes in addressing cultural differences and in language teaching has proved to be problematic (cf. Baker 2015). Certainly, there is always a need for simplification and generalizations in teaching especially because of what Baker (ibid.: 21) describes ‘as the pressures and constraints teachers often face’ and which force them to subside teaching of intercultural competence even if they believe in its importance. However, the dangers of oversimplification and ensuing stereotyping are great when it comes to intercultural matters. Although intercultural communication books are aware of the implications posed by globalization for future business professionals, ‘the interconnectedness of teaching English and teaching intercultural awareness – a connection that is so obvious in English as a Lingua Franca research – is missed in business school contexts’ (Santner-Wolfartsberger, 2015: 56) and in ESBP pedagogy in general.

Teaching business English needs to be based on BELF research findings because BELF as a research paradigm seems to be the most suitable to describe English as used by business professionals and the most representative of the complex realities of business intercultural communication. As Pullin (2015) argues, BELF users’ approach to communication, especially in terms of flexibility regarding sociocultural norms and effective communication strategies, seems to be a more appropriate model for teaching, as this approach goes beyond basic linguistic competence (see section [4.5](#) for discussion of competence in ELF research).

As Pullin (ibid.: 35) rightly put it, the GCC model (discussed in sections [4.4.3.1](#) and [9.3.1.2](#) above) appears ‘to be at the cutting-edge of needs analysis in terms of how BELF speakers use the language for international business’. This is because the GCC model focuses on the strategic role of business communication, with the aim of viewing business English learning less as foreign language learning and more as a strategic approach to business communication. Informed by BELF research findings and guided by the GCC model as a tool for teaching business English, educators need to focus on the second level of competence, i.e. competence in ELF. Using the authentic data offered in BELF research, business English teachers/trainers can show how BELF users in real BELF situations are able to make use of the core of the English language while also using highly specialized, shared terms and concepts to adapt to the forms and norms of the language required in each business situation. Business English teaching should illustrate how BELF users utilize elements of strategic competence and pragmatic competence through using different communicative strategies in order to arrive at mutual understanding. Utilizing accommodation strategies (e.g. paraphrasing, code-switching, repetitions) should be one of business English courses’ objectives. Listening to actual BELF use with participants with varying proficiency levels while focusing on accommodation and communicative strategies can lead to better understanding of how English is used in business intercultural communication.

9.4 Doing research in a business environment: methodological considerations

One of the characteristic features of qualitative studies taking place in business environment was apparent to me early on and remained an integral part of my daily interactions at Deema Arabia; that is, the participants need information about my research objectives and agenda in more detail than I had explained in the information sheet (cf. Bryman and Bell, 2011). I needed to explain who I was, what my research was about, why I wanted to do it and my previous professional experience. While I explained such things many times and gave out information sheets in advance, the information I gave was not enough for many of the participants. Very often, I had to deal with questions regarding the relevance of my research. I had to explain to the potential participants why I thought my research was important. I was repeatedly asked why I was studying

language use, as business communication in English is fairly common, regardless of what research has to say about it. In more than one instance, I was told, directly or indirectly, that my research was useless.

Not only was the feasibility of my research questioned, but some of the participants, who obviously came from a positivist research background, expressed doubts about the qualitative design of my study. As Vaara *et al.* (2005: 613) explain, qualitative research is not always welcome in the business environment. This meant having to explain my position and ideologies as a qualitative researcher. On the one hand, explaining my research in detail was obviously important to get my participants to feel comfortable with my presence, but at the same time I did not want to influence their interactions by focusing their attention on language use, which I feared I would do by making my specific research ideology and interest overt to them. As explained in detail in section [5.6.1](#), this observer's effect has always been an issue in sociolinguistic research. The general information I initially gave when presenting my background was that I was a PhD student working on a project about the use of English as a corporate language. I often was pressed for more information on my research. This interest in my research arose partly out of concerns about access and confidentiality (see also Bryman and Bell, 2011). The participants wanted to know that I had a legitimate task before they could open up to me. They needed to know that they were not wasting their time on me. However, part of this was also a sincere interest in my project and my results. Although no official announcement was made within the company about my presence, word about me and my project spread. While I cannot judge whether talking to people actually caused them to modify their language use when I was around, it did lead to some employees coming up to me and talking to me about language use and language choices. This provided me with valuable data, suggestions for new topics, and names of other staff members who were good candidates for interviews.

I found out that I needed to position myself both as an insider and as an outsider. The insider status was important because employees were more willing to spend time with me when they heard that the research was done in cooperation with Deema Arabia, and that I was part of their organization, which I displayed by wearing my nametag with the company's logo, as will be further

discussed in section [9.4.1](#). At the same time, I needed to make it clear to the potential participants that I was not sent by the management to spy on them, particularly because the word 'observation', which was used in the information sheet (see Appendix 2), in itself was somewhat threatening to some of them. Therefore, I also needed to emphasize my outsider status by explaining that even though I was affiliated with Deema Arabia for the duration of my fieldwork, the project was my own, funded by the local university and supervised by an overseas university.

Furthermore, I had to make my position as a PhD student clear to my potential participants. Contrary to some instances in the literature (e.g. Eckert, 1997) where the researcher needs to avoid being seen as a high status outsider in order to gain access to the CoP, I felt that I had to avoid being seen as 'just a student' in some situations. In order to gain access to people, I found that I had to emphasize my previous business experience, my current position at the local university and the name of the academic institution in which I am currently studying. These concerns, however, gradually lessened as I became known to most of Deema Arabia's CoP members, especially when I took some secretarial tasks in the IT department and became, officially, a member of their CoP. The next section discusses the methodological benefits of having an insider status in the CoP.

9.4.1 Methodological benefits of being 'an insider'

This study is a response to Ehrenreich's (2009) call for ethnographic studies and micro-analysis of BELF CoPs in order to capture the context-specific details in the linguistic behaviour and social characteristics of their members. Thus, it has relied on authentic business data (as opposed to simulations) which provides true representations of the complex realities of BELF use.

As explained in Chapter 5, my thesis is not an ethnography per se, but it adopts an ethnographic perspective on language use. During my presence in the field, I was an outsider at the beginning as the researcher, but eventually (though briefly) I became an insider as I took on some secretarial tasks to help out in the department where I carried my observations. As O'Reilly (2009) sufficiently explains, this has the following benefits:

Insiders [...] blend in more, gain more rapport, participate more easily having more linguistic competence with which they can ask subtle questions on more complex issues, and are

better at reading non-verbal communications. [...] They get beyond the ideal to the real, daily lived, and back-stage experiences. That rather than describing the conscious grammar of the community, their ethnographies are expressions of it, the result of a superior insiders knowledge gained through primary socialization (O'Reilly, 2009: 114).

Although my status as an insider happened toward the end of my fieldwork, it did enrich my knowledge of the participants and gave me better background understanding. I did not have to rely on questionnaires to survey my participants' attitudes toward BELF use in their workplace. Language attitudes research based on questionnaires has many drawbacks and cannot be as telling as research adopting an ethnographic perspective. In addition, during my fieldwork, I had the chance to observe my participants as they were immersed in their jobs and communicating through BELF. I can argue that by the end of my stay at the company, my status as a researcher was completely overcome or even forgotten. I was able to prepare an interview guide for interviewing each participant based on my participant observation. This enabled me to raise 'subtle questions' (O'Reilly, 2009: 114) related to the participants' language choices (e.g. Meeting extract 6.8 and related discussion with Mohyee). I was also able to repeatedly return to the participants to gather more information. This became especially important when I realized that I would not be able to recruit participants for retrospective interviews due to time constraints.

Additionally, most of my conversations with the HR manager, who served as my key informant, happened during my days of being an insider (cf. Extracts 8.27 and 8.28). The background information given at the beginning of the analysis concerning the extracts in chapters 6 and 7 is largely based on my insider's knowledge of 'back-stage experiences' (O'Reilly, 2009: 114), knowledge gained through my participation as a member of Deema Arabia's CoP. Additionally, my insider status gave me insights into the language use of CoP members often marginalized and neglected especially in non-ethnographic studies. For example, my interview with Mamat, the IT department janitor, was only possible because he recognized that I was part of the IT team and started interacting with me and eventually allowed me to interview him. However, in spite of the richness offered by my status as an insider, this thesis has some limitations, as seen in the next section.

9.4.2 Limitations

The limitations in this thesis are predominantly related to the data collection methods and the nature of the participants. First, the number of participants who agreed to partake in my research is small, and the study took place in only one company. Ideally, the same research would be carried out in more than one setting for validation of findings and for generalizability to other similar contexts. Although most of the findings here concur with the findings of previous ELF and BELF research, it is important to acknowledge that every business organization has its own setting and can thus provide a different perspective on the use of BELF in Saudi MNCs. Therefore, further studies in different contexts, particularly in Expanding Circle business settings, are needed to test the validity of the findings and claims presented here.

Regarding the nature of my participants, most of them come from similar cultural/national backgrounds with Arabic participants constituting 50 per cent of my participants, followed by Urdu speakers and then Tagalog speakers. Although these groups constitute the majority of expatriates in Saudi Arabia (see section [5.3](#) for discussion of research context), if this research included participants from other backgrounds, the data collected and the findings generated could have been different. NESs, although an important part of Deema CoPs (see sections [5.3](#) and [8.4](#) for details), were not fully represented in my thesis with only one unrecorded interview. More input from Deema Arabia's NES members would have allowed for a better understanding of their perceptions of BELF communication in their CoP and how they are perceived by their colleagues, especially since communication with NESs was one of the major themes generated in the analysis of the ethnographic interviews, as seen in section [8.4.1](#).

Additionally, some of my participants were particularly challenging. Adel, for example, was one of the remarkable interviewees who showed deep understanding of historical and social matters related to language. His first degree is in history and his second degree is an MA in journalism. My interview with him is the longest (74 minutes). He also attended one of the two retrospective group interviews and expressed strong opinions in relation to English in the workplace. Adel is not the typical business professional because his knowledge of languages and their role in world history is profound. Although his input was very interesting, it does not represent the knowledge

and the expertise of the average business professional. My interview with Wesam was a bit challenging as well. Prior to the interview, he insisted on having a list of the questions I wanted to ask him in order to prepare himself for the interview, but I told that I did not have such lists. During the interview, however, I noticed that he was more aware of the concept of BELF than I had anticipated. I contacted him after I came back to London to ask if he had done research on the topic before the interview or if he had prepared his answers in anyway; he said he did a 'quick google search' before my interview with him, but he indicated that his answers were based on his experience. Therefore, I cannot treat data from Adel's and Wesam's interviews as representative of views of business people without flagging these two facts.

In close relation to the above concerns is the influence of my presence as the researcher and the research process itself on the participants' behaviour and responses. Although, as explained in section [5.6.1](#), my status as a researcher was overcome at the end of my fieldwork, this was an issue at the beginning of my research. Particularly, my participants were able to guess or know for sure my research interests and objectives. This eventually led some of my participants to modify or at least monitor their language use in my presence (see my comment in Field note 6.1 for one example of this modification). Consequently, acknowledging and flagging this influence where documented is important.

Finally, due to time and space constraints, I had to focus my research on oral communication solely. This, however, does not mean that written communication in Deema Arabia did not have any intercultural implications. Because I was given access to the company's intranet, I had the chance to see the complexities of email communication between Deema's CoP members. The company's policy for internet communication is more established and clearer than for oral communication, and as a result, the BELF data generated in written communication could be very telling for future BELF research. Therefore, this is an area which needs further investigation as well.

9.5 Final remarks

Throughout this project, my principal research objective has been to provide an in-depth qualitative investigation of BELF in the rich business communication context of the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC), specifically in Saudi multinational corporations (MNCs), an area which has not yet been investigated. I aimed to focus on BELF users' shared discourse practices and communicative strategies which contribute to the co-construction of meaning, in addition to the participants' orientations toward using BELF in their daily business life. Specifically, this thesis examined the functional roles that Arabic, English and other languages have in Deema Arabia, the salient features of BELF communication in Deema Arabia and how intercultural communication in BELF is perceived in Deema Arabia as a Saudi MNC. As explained above, findings of this research may be highly important, especially in advancing awareness of the BELF phenomenon in the business communication in Saudi Arabia specifically and in the world generally, and in developing new training materials for business English courses and business intercultural communication training programmes based on the sociolinguistic realities of the business domain.

For the past four years, this project has not been simply a part of my life. I was living in and with the PhD. Demanding as it has been, I truly cherish this experience because it has taught a number of valuable lessons. Because the object of my study (BELF) is multidisciplinary, I had to do tremendous readings from various fields of knowledge in order to be able to grasp the nature of verbal business communication. These readings did not only help formulate a comprehensive account of language use in multinational/multicultural workplaces, they also provided me with promising ideas for future research on BELF. Doing this PhD has also deepened my understanding about conducting qualitative research. I realize that there things I could have done better, specifically in regards to my fieldwork as explained in section [9.4.2](#) on limitaions. However, I also realize that these shortcomings, frustrating as they can be, are part and parcel of any research project and are not always avoidable, especially when there are pressing time constraints as in the case of this project. The lessons I learned throughout this PhD will stay with me for the rest of my life and will surely reflect on my future research projects. Thus, despite the various difficulties and the emotional turmoil I went through while doing the PhD, I feel this was an emancipating experience and thoroughly enjoyable.

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Appendix 1: Data Transcription Conventions

(Based on the mark-up conventions of the Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English

VOICE)

(.)	Brief pause
(1)	Longer pauses are timed in seconds.
<L1 Ar>	Utterance in a participant's first language
<i>Italics</i>	Words in languages other than English
{ }	Translation of code-switched utterance
=	Latching (linked or continuing utterances with no overlap or pause between utterances)
@@	Laughter
?	Words spoken with rising intonation are followed by a question mark.
CAPITAL	If a speaker gives a syllable, word or phrase particular prominence, this is written in capital letters.
<1> </1>	Whenever two or more utterances happen at the same time, the overlaps are marked with numbered tags: <1> </1>. Everything that is simultaneous gets the same number.
:	Lengthened sounds are marked with a colon.
[name1]	Other names or descriptors are anonymized by [name1].
[xx]	Not transcribed for the sake of the company's anonymity.
[?]	Inaudible/not clear

Appendix 2: Information Sheet for Interviews

Postgraduate Research Study

Investigation of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) in Saudi Multinational Corporations

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

I would like to invite you to participate in this original postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study? English is, undisputedly, the language of international business today. However, it is believed that English used amongst non-native speakers in the business world is concerned with getting the job done and focuses on message content rather than the form of the message. This unique use of the English language is what inspires my research project. The main purpose of my study is to provide a detailed investigation of the English language as used in a Saudi multinational corporation. It focuses on the linguistic shared practices of English speakers in the community of Saudi multinational corporations.

Who is being recruited? I am recruiting international business professionals working in Saudi multinational corporations who use English to conduct their daily business routines.

What will participation involve? If you agree to take part in this study, you will be interviewed at the time of your choice and in the company's site or any place you prefer. The interview will last for one hour maximum. This interview is intended as an opportunity for you to express your experiences and your thoughts about English language use in your daily business life. The interviews will be audio recorded, subject to your permission, and later will be transcribed into text form.

As part of the presentation of results, your own words may be used in text form. This will be anonymised, so that you cannot be identified from what you said. All of the research data will be stored on my own PC until the completion of my research project in the next three years. Please note that:

- You can decide to stop the interview at any point
- You need not answer questions that you do not wish to
- Your name will be removed from the information and anonymised. It will not be possible to identify anyone from my reports on this study.
- The information you provide will not be shared with anyone else in the company, including the General Manager.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw during the interview or any time up until 1st August 2014 and without giving a reason. I mention this date because this is expected to be the final stage of my data analysis. If you withdraw from the study, all data will be withdrawn and destroyed. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this Information Sheet to keep and be asked to sign a Consent Form.

Any risks: I cannot foresee any risks to your taking part in this research. All the interviews will focus on your experiences, ideas and linguistic practices, and there is no reason to predict that any delicate issues will be brought to the centre of the conversation. You are welcome to interrupt the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Possible benefits: I believe that taking part in this research will give you the chance to share your experiences, reflect on your language use, and engage in group discussions which will provide you with your colleagues' views about language use, and therefore you will know areas where further development or training is needed. Concurrently, you will be participating in research that will, hopefully, contribute to the improvement and enrichment of the field of business English language teaching. After the completion of my research project, you will be given a comprehensive report of my research findings.

Arrangements for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality: To ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 you must be informed of what information will be held about you and who will have access to it. As mentioned above, the interviews will be audio recorded, subject to your permission and later will be transcribed into text form. It should be made clear that no one else (external agency) is being used to transcribe data. Your identity will be kept confidential; the transcription of interviews will be carried out by myself and on the transcripts I will use the pseudonyms that you will choose. To ensure your anonymity, the final report will mention only these pseudonyms and any other information that could lead to the identification of you or other particular people mentioned will be omitted or changed. Furthermore, I will only use my personal computer and electronic devices during the research, all the data will be encrypted following King's College Encryption Guidance and I will use passwords which I will select and secure according to the guidance of King's College London IT Security Framework (Password Policy).

If this study has harmed you in any way you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information:

Primary Supervisor: Martin Dewey, Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics

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Researcher: Nuha Alharbi, MPhil/PhD student, Department of Education & Professional Studies, School of Social Science & Public Policy, King's College London

Waterloo Bridge Wing (Franklin-Wilkins Building), Waterloo Road, London, SE1 9NH

E-mail: Nuha.alharbi@kcl.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this Information Sheet.

Appendix 3: Information Sheet for Observation and Fieldnotes

Postgraduate Research Study

Investigation of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) in Saudi Multinational Corporations

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

I would like to invite you to participate in this original postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study? English is, undisputedly, the language of international business today. However, it is believed that English used amongst non-native speakers in the business world is concerned with getting the job done and focuses on message content rather than the form of the message. This unique use of the English language is what inspires my research project. The main purpose of my study is to provide a detailed investigation of the English language as used in a Saudi multinational corporation. It focuses on the linguistic shared practices of English speakers in the community of Saudi multinational corporations.

Who is being recruited? I am recruiting international business professionals working in Saudi multinational corporations who use English to conduct their daily business routines.

What will participation involve? With permission from the company's management, I will be present in your department for about three months in order to collect observational data of English language use. If you agree to take part in this study, I will be taking notes of your language use during my presence and might use your words as examples in the presentation of results. This will be anonymised, so that you cannot be identified from what you said. All of the research data will be stored on my own PC until the completion of my research project in the next three years. Please note that:

- You can decide to ask me to stop taking notes of your language use at any point
- The information you provide will not be shared with anyone else in the company, including the General Manager.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw any time up until 1st August 2014 and without giving a reason. I mention this date because this is expected to be the final stage of my data analysis. If you withdraw from the study, all data will be withdrawn and destroyed. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this Information Sheet to keep and be asked to sign a Consent Form.

Any risks: I cannot foresee any risks to your taking part in this research. The observations and fieldnotes will focus on linguistic practices, and there is no reason to predict that any delicate issues will be part of my data. You are welcome to interrupt the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Possible benefits: I believe that taking part in this research will give you the chance to share your experiences, reflect on your language use, and engage in group discussions which will provide you with your colleagues' views about language use, and therefore you will know areas where further development or training is needed. Concurrently, you

will be participating in research that will, hopefully, contribute to the improvement and enrichment of the field of business English language teaching. After the completion of my research project, you will be given a comprehensive report of my research findings.

Arrangements for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality: To ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 you must be informed of what information will be held about you and who will have access to it. It should be made clear that no one else (external agency) is being used to transcribe data. Your identity will be kept confidential; the transcription of data will be carried out by myself and on the transcripts I will use the pseudonyms. To ensure your anonymity, the final report will mention only these pseudonyms and any other information that could lead to the identification of you or other particular people mentioned will be omitted or changed. Furthermore, I will only use my personal computer and electronic devices during the research, all the data will be encrypted following King's College Encryption Guidance and I will use passwords which I will select and secure according to the guidance of King's College London IT Security Framework (Password Policy).

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Researcher: Nuha Alharbi, MPhil/PhD student, Department of Education & Professional Studies, School of Social Science & Public Policy, King's College London

Waterloo Bridge Wing (Franklin-Wilkins Building), Waterloo Road, London, SE1 9NH

E-mail: Nuha.alharbi@kcl.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this Information Sheet.

Appendix 4: Information Sheet for Audio-Recordings and Retrospective Interviews

Postgraduate Research Study

Investigation of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) in Saudi Multinational Corporations

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

I would like to invite you to participate in this original postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study? English is, undisputedly, the language of international business today. However, it is believed that English used amongst non-native speakers in the business world is concerned with getting the job done and focuses on message content rather than the form of the message. This unique use of the English language is what inspires my research project. The main purpose of my study is to provide a detailed investigation of the English language as used in a Saudi multinational corporation. It focuses on the linguistic shared practices of English speakers in the community of Saudi multinational corporations.

Who is being recruited? I am recruiting international business professionals working in Saudi multinational corporations who use English to conduct their daily business routines.

What will participation involve? I will be present at meetings that I am invited to by the head of the department. I will be audio-recording these meetings and taking notes of the details that cannot be audio-recorded (e.g. details about the meeting participants, body language and the physical setting). After recording the meetings, I will transcribe them into text form and analyse them linguistically. I will then arrange to have an interview with you to discuss the linguistic content of the recorded meetings. This interview will last for an hour maximum and, subject to your permission, will be recorded.

As part of the presentation of results, your own words may be used in text form. This will be anonymised, so that you cannot be identified from what you said. All of the research data will be stored on my own PC until the completion of my research project in the next three years. Please note that:

- You can decide to stop the recording during the meetings at any point
- Your name will be removed from the information and anonymised. It will not be possible to identify anyone from my reports on this study.
- You can decide to stop the later interview at any point, and you need not answer questions that you do not wish to
- The information you provide will not be shared with anyone else in the company, including the General Manager.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw during the meeting/interview or any time up until 1st August 2014 and without giving a reason. I mention this date because this is expected to be the final stage of my data analysis. If you withdraw from the study, all data will be withdrawn and destroyed. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this Information Sheet to keep and be asked to sign a Consent Form.

Any risks: I cannot foresee any risks to your taking part in this research. All the interviews will focus on your experiences, ideas and linguistic practices, and there is no reason to predict that any delicate issues will be brought to the centre of the conversation. You are welcome to interrupt the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Possible benefits: I believe that taking part in this research will give you the chance to share your experiences, reflect on your language use, and engage in group discussions which will provide you with your colleagues' views about language use, and therefore you will know areas where further development or training is needed. Concurrently, you will be participating in research that will, hopefully, contribute to the improvement and enrichment of the field of business English language teaching. After the completion of my research project, you will be given a comprehensive report of my research findings.

Arrangements for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality: To ensure compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 you must be informed of what information will be held about you and who will have access to it. As mentioned above, the meetings/interviews will be audio recorded, subject to your permission and later will be transcribed into text form. It should be made clear that no one else (external agency) is being used to transcribe data. Your identity will be kept confidential; the transcription of interviews will be carried out by myself and on the transcripts I will use the pseudonyms that you will choose. To ensure your anonymity, the final report will mention only these pseudonyms and any other information that could lead to the identification of you or other particular people mentioned will be omitted or changed. Furthermore, I will only use my personal computer and electronic devices during the research, all the data will be encrypted following King's College Encryption Guidance and I will use passwords which I will select and secure according to the guidance of King's College London IT Security Framework (Password Policy).

If this study has harmed you in any way you can contact King's College London using the details below for further advice and information:

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Waterloo Bridge Wing (Franklin-Wilkins Building), Waterloo Road, London, SE1 9NH

E-mail: Ursula.wingate@kcl.ac.uk

Researcher: Nuha Alharbi, MPhil/PhD student, Department of Education & Professional Studies, School of Social Science & Public Policy, King's College London

Waterloo Bridge Wing (Franklin-Wilkins Building), Waterloo Road, London, SE1 9NH

E-mail: Nuha.alharbi@kcl.ac.uk

Appendix 5: Approach Letter to Gatekeepers

Postgraduate Research Study

Investigation of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) in Saudi Multinational Corporations

Dear Mr.....,

My name is Nuha Alharbi, an English language instructor in King Abdulaziz University and I am currently pursuing my PhD in Education and Professional Studies in King's College London. I am writing to you in order to ask for your permission to conduct my research data collection in your company. My research aims to explore the use of English as a business lingua franca (medium language of communication between people who do not share a first language) in Saudi multinational corporations.

English is, undisputedly, the language of intercultural communication and international business today. However, it is believed that English used amongst non-native speakers in the business world is concerned with getting the job done and focuses on message content rather than the form of the message and its linguistic correctness. This unique use of the English language is what inspires my research project. The main purpose of my study is to provide a detailed investigation of the English language as used in Saudi multinational corporations. It focuses on the linguistic shared practices of English speakers in Saudi multinational corporations, in addition to their orientations toward using English in their everyday business routines.

In order to conduct my research, I need to gain access to a multinational corporation in Saudi Arabia. Since your company is one of the leading international corporations in Jeddah, I decided to approach you to get your permission to access your company's site to spend from 2 to 3 months collecting my research data. The types of data I need to collect include:

1. Observational data and informal discussions with the staff members.
2. Semi-structured interviews to discuss the participants' views of their use of English.
3. Audio-recordings of naturally occurring interactions. These include recordings of staff meetings (I acknowledge the fact that meetings vary in terms of the sensitivity of the topics discussed; therefore, I will only be present in the meetings that you invite me to).
4. Retrospective interviews about the audio-recorded interactions (described above in point 3).

Based on your acceptance, I will come to your company and distribute sheets that include information about my research along with consent forms (copies of which are attached to this letter) to all the staff members. In case they consent to participate in my research, I will arrange for the semi-structured interviews that will take up to one hour each. I will need to conduct around 20 semi-structured interviews at the end of the first month of data collection, in addition to 20 retrospective interviews at the end of the data collection process. Please be sure that I will treat all the data collected with extreme confidentiality, and I will be the only one who has access to it. All the data will be anonymised and all the audio-recordings will be deleted after the transcription.

If you accept to grant me access to your company to conduct my data collection, you will give your employees the chance to share their experiences, reflect on their language use, and engage in group discussions which will provide them with their colleagues' views about language use too, and therefore they will know areas where further development or training is needed. Concurrently, you will be participating in research that will, hopefully, contribute to the improvement and enrichment of the field of business English language teaching in Saudi Arabia in particular, and in the world in general. After the completion of my research project, you will be given a comprehensive report of my research findings.

If you support the conduct of my research in your company, or if you need more information about my research, please do not hesitate to contact me at the following address:

Department of Education & Professional Studies

School of Social Science & Public Policy

King's College London

SE1 9NH

E-mail: Nuha.alharbi@kcl.ac.uk

Best regards,

Nuha Alharbi

Appendix 6: Original Arabic Extracts

Extract 6.8

أنا عارف إنك تدوري على نظرية و لا تأسسي نظرية و لا تحاولي تثبتي نظرية لكن
الطريقة اللي نستخدم فيها اللغة هنا بسيطة شوية انجليزي و شوية عربي و يمشي
الموضوع

Extract 6.12

أحياناً دا يضايق ناس اللي بيغوني اصبر عليهم علشان يتعلموا لغة بس ياخي دا
شغل مو معهد انجليزي تبغى تتعلم روح سجل في دورة الله يسهل لك لكن هنا
مكان
شغل و لازم ننجز

Extract 8.14

إنهم يخلونا نتكلم انجليزي اللغة اللي فقط و بشكل أساسي مرتبطة ببيئة العمل
العقلانية و الجادة فهم بيحرموا الشركة من جزء من أرائنا و من و من ابداعنا اللي
ممكن تلاقياها في مظاهر أخرى في حياتنا (.) هم تقريبا كئثم بيطلبوا منا
نتصرف كأشخاص تانيين و هذا الشي ممكن يخلق مسافة بيني و بين الشركة (.)
مو أنا أو مو بس أنا متأكد إنه كثيرين يحسوا نفس الشي بس ما يقولوا لأسباب
مختلفة

Extract 8.17

الانجليزي هو لغة البنزس هذا الشي اوكي بالنسبة ليا و لغيري كثير أتوقع {...} الناس اللي شايفين إنه في حرب بين الانجليزي و العربي هذا جدال ما يسوى و لا هي معركة تسوى هذا كله ماله فائدة {...} العالم يحتاج لغة جلوبال كلنا نحتاجها {...} عالم الاعمال الاعلام حتى الأكل صار معولم فبالأكيد انه مو من صالحنا انه نكون متشددين و انه نرفض هدي التغييرات و انه نحبس نفسنا بين جدران اللغة العربية (.). بس لا تفهميني غلط أنا أحب العربي و أتمنى إنه ياخذ مكان الانجلش بس أنا واقعي و أنا ماني شايف انه هذا الشي راح يحصل قريب فأنا راضي بالانجلش

Extract 8.18

خلينا نقول انه الواحد يتكلم عربي كلغته القومية و الشخصية و الانجلش كلغة البنزس

Extract 8.19

الاجانب بالرغم انهم اقلية يفرضون لغتهم علينا احنا السعوديين في بلدنا احنا. واحد هندي مرة قال لي: لو تبغى تشتغل معايا كلمني بالانجليزي لو سمحت (٢) اظن لو أنت في بلد أنت اللي لازم تتكلم لغتها مو تخلي اهلها يغيروا لغتهم علشانك. يعني احنا نتكلم انجليزي في انجلترا لكن هذي ساودي ارابيا و حياة ربي

Extract 8.32

لو أنت تتكلمي انجليزي راح تقدرى تتجاوبى بسرعة و بشكل مناسب و بالتالى تعطي لرئيسك انطباع انك ذكية و مركزة و ياعدتي في حل المشكلة (.) لكن لو انجليزيتك ضعيفة راح ينعقد لسانك و بس ما راح تقدرى تساهمى (.) و لا أحيانا تقعدى تتكلمي و تتكلمي و تشوفى الناس يحاولوا يطلعوا معنى مفيد لكلامك و تضيعيهم و تضيعى معاهم @@@ بس حقيقى الموضوع ما يضحك لأنه أحيانا يكون محرج جدا

Extract 8.41

هم {المتحدثين الاصليين} يفترضوا إننا لأننا نتكلم اللغة انه احنا نتكلمها بنفس العبه الثقافى حقها

Extract 8.36

أنا ما أتكلم انجليزي. ما أتكلم لغتهم مو بالطريقة اللي يتكلمونها على الأقل (.) عمري ما راح أكون ضمن صراعات القوة حقهم و لا من حرب المكاتب السياسية ما أقدر أنافسهم بهذا المستوى فقاعد هنا بهذا المستوى مكان ما تكفينى لغتى (.) و لا حتى هنا مكفيتهم فى الكول سنتر

Extract 8.37

زملائني لفوا العالم و ياخذوا دورات تدريبيه و أنا ما يخلونني أقدم إلا في الدورات حقت
عمان و لا القاهرة ليش؟ علشان لغتي الانجليزية

Extract 8.38

هم مو فاهمين إنني أعاني (.) عانيت لمن كان الانجليزي مادة في المدرسة و أعاني
نحين في لقمة عيشي

Appendix 7: Sample Interview

Participant: Haidar

Duration: 62 minutes

Bold= Nuha

- 1 **Let me first of all ask you how long have you been working in**
2 **multinational corporations that use English as their official corporate**
3 **language?**
- 4 Aah just this company I'm working for. I've been working here for five years.
- 5 **Aha five years. And how long have you been living in Saudi Arabia before**
6 **that?**
- 7 No, it's probably now eight years.
- 8 **Where do originally you come from?**
- 9 India.
- 10 **Do you mind telling me why did you choose to come to Saudi Arabia?**
- 11 To work. IT is common in India not special. Here it is not the same case.
- 12 **But why SA?**
- 13 Because the salaries are high here.
- 14 **Yeah but it is also high in Kuwait and Bahrain and Dubai.**
- 15 My mom is with me and she wants SA because she wants to do Hajj.
- 16 **Yeah, of course. And what position do you have in DEEMA now?**
- 17 I'm working as the IT support team leader.

18 **IT support team leader and you have been working for seven years. What's**
19 **your native language?**

20 I speak many local Indian languages.

21 **Of course India has so many languages.**

22 Yes, we have thousands of different languages.

23 **What language do you consider your mother tongue? What language is**
24 **spoken at your home?**

25 It's called hmm I don't know if you can even pronounce it. It's called Malayalam.

26 **Can you spell it for me?**

27 It's M A L A Y A L A M

28 **Thanks.**

29 Now can you try to read it?

30 **I'll try later @@@**

31 @@@ I know it is hard @@@

32 **Can you just inform me about the situation in India. Is it Hindi, the main**
33 **language?**

34 Yes, that's our mother tongue. Hindi is the mother tongue of the majority.

35 **It's the official language.**

36 The official language of all Indians, but in my case, for me, this language is
37 spoken in the state called Kerala so this is the South East part of India, so in my
38 place no one talks Hindi.

39 **But you do speak it, right?**

40 Yes I do. In our state our second language is English actually.

41 **Oh really, interesting and what is the language of study in schools? Do**
42 **you study in English?**

43 Yes, we study in English but not in all schools.

44 **How did you learn Hindi if nobody speaks Hindi in your area? You said that**
45 **Hindi is the official language. Do you speak it?**

46 No, we don't speak it. Most of the people ... I mean not most, I could say 99% of
 47 people in my state do not speak Hindi and they don't know anything about Hindi.

48 **I have to ask a question just to record all the details. Are you a Muslim?**

49 Yes.

50 **So it's a Muslim part of India.**

51 Not really.

52 **So your native language and then comes English after this language.**

53 No. When I was in the school I had three options because in the school we have
 54 these options. We can choose one of the languages as the second language for
 55 us. I was studying in English medium school, so the main language there is
 56 English so we study all the subjects in English. But we had this option to choose
 57 the second language, which is either Hindi or our native language, the one that
 58 we usually speak.

59 **You chose to study your native language Malayalam.**

60 Malayalam, yes. I think when I finished my fifth grade, when I moved up to sixth I
 61 had these options so I chose Hindi because I was really interested because you
 62 know these Bollywood movies ...

63 **Of course, I wish I could speak the language.**

64 Yes, so that's our language. That's our mother tongue as an Indian so I was very
 65 much interested to study Hindi, so I tried but I failed.

66 **You were six years old. How come? Sixteen or six?**

67 No I said sixth grade. Basic stuff even. Even my mom when the result came, you
 68 know, for the annual exam my mum was not happy at all because [?] Hindi you
 69 will lose him, you know.

70 **So your marks were lower because of Hindi.**

71 Yes, I'm getting low marks all the time because this is something new to me, so
 72 I'm just trying to learn, whereas for me Malayalam could be the easiest because
 73 I speak. That's our native language.

74 **So the TV in your state, in this area where you live ...**

75 It's Malayalam (2) for me I have this experience. I don't understand it. I've tried
 76 to study this subject, I mean Hindi. I know the basics now. I can't understand ...
 77 even I speak these days because I mingle with many people here, you know,

78 people who come from north part of India. Their language is Hindi. So when I
79 started to mingle with them I get to learn this language.

80 **Who uses Hindi from these people?**

81 This is the problem. When you ask an Indian about their language it gets
82 complicated.

83 **It's very interesting for me because my research is all about language and**
84 **language complications.**

85 To be honest, I recently read that we have about 1200 different languages, but
86 not officially.

87 **As far as I know, you have so many official languages. I think many official**
88 **languages.**

89 This one is one of them, Malayalam. Another thing is that if I drive 500km [?] if I
90 travel 500 km from my house and I go to another state hmm I don't know if you
91 have heard of [?] this state Chennai, maybe you might have heard of this place. I
92 don't understand a word they speak. It's just 500 km.

93 **It's the same country. It's a huge continent. They say it's a semi-continent**
94 **or something so you can expect that.**

95 Yes, so this is the situation there. In my case I do understand Hindi. These
96 people, they speak Urdu. Urdu and Hindi sound very similar simply because
97 that's why you don't find people from Pakistan and India don't have much
98 difficulty speaking to each other because they speak Urdu, and also here there
99 are people who speak Urdu, and Urdu and Hindi are very much linked to each
100 other.

101 **How about English? The English you learned at that school, while you**
102 **were learning you picked up English.**

103 Yes.

104 **But you didn't go to a special school to learn English.**

105 No.

106 **You didn't go take a course, an English course.**

107 In our place the school standard is like you can study [?] I mean you can go to a
108 school where they will teach you everything in your native language, and there
109 are schools they call English middle school.

110 **Like yours.**

111 Yes. So you've got there special teachers to teach you everything in just
112 English.

113 **So you picked up English while you were growing up. You didn't like start**
114 **learning English at a certain stage of your life as an adult?**

115 No. But still in my school my teachers were not that strict that you should be
116 talking in English or something like that, so it's like because we speak
117 Malayalam at home and when we go to the school they try to make us talk
118 English, so for me since I mean since I joined the school I started studying
119 everything in English, but and in my school it wasn't that English wasn't much
120 They were not using English much, but it's an English medium school, because
121 some people it's hard for them to pick up English.

122 **Do you consider yourself a native speaker of English?**

123 No @@@

124 **Do you know that in India English is described as a nativized English now?**
125 **In the world of linguistics now we consider Indian English as a nativized**
126 **English because of the colonial era in which India was colonised by**
127 **Britain. It was spread all over the country so people developed their own**
128 **English there.**

129 Yes. I hear stuff sometimes like what you say but no I am not native.

130 **Then how do you evaluate your English? Do you consider it very good,**
131 **good, or good enough, or weak?**

132 For me, the question that teachers ask me I used to think I'm not that XXX.
133 Comparing to other people I can speak, I can write, I can chat with people, but
134 the same thing where I started people come from British, America, and those
135 places. I feel like I have to learn. We have this pre-concept like English belongs
136 to them. You understand what I'm saying, right?

137 **I do understand what you're saying.**

138 So we have this, okay, we're not as good as::

139 **You have native English as a target for your learning outcomes.**

140 Absolutely.

141 **You want to learn as good as and to be a native-like.**

142 So because this is what's my mind set actually since my childhood, I feel like
143 when I watch Hollywood movies we got this language from them. We didn't have
144 this language before.

145 **The person who is famous in this movement of rejecting the idea native**
 146 **English as a model is Indian. he resisted the idea of a native speaker**
 147 **model of English and called for acknowledging international varieties of**
 148 **English.**

149 On international level I don't know how much is it accepted, I mean our
 150 language, because I'll give an example; 100,000 If you want to say 100,000 you
 151 just say in English 100,000, but we don't say that,. We say one lakh. Have you
 152 ever heard of this word?

153 **No.**

154 We say one lack. For 100,000 we say one lakh. 200,000, we say two lakhs. One
 155 billion, we don't say billion. We say one hundred lakhs

156 **And you say this even if you're speaking in English.**

157 In English. It's there in my book. It's there in my book which I studied in the
 158 school. So it's not accepted, so I realised I was talking to an English guy, so I
 159 told him one lakh. We were just discussing about some figures.

160 **He understood or he didn't.**

161 He didn't. He said "One lakh, what is that? Can you write it down for me?"

162 **So 100,000.**

163 Yes, what language you say it? I said this is English. That's what I studied.

164 **And it's Indian English actually. Okay, that's fantastic. That's an amazing**
 165 **example.**

166 You think so yeah

167 **Yeah, of course (2)**

168 **Hmmm do you think that your English has given you any competitive**
 169 **advantage here in DEEMA or like in your job here? Does it give you any**
 170 **privileges that other people who do not speak English do not have?**

171 Yes. Of course yes. I feel it is something like an asset. Yes, because DEEMA
 172 the whole Saudi Arabia market or the business world here, DEEMA is always on
 173 the international level, so here people I mean even Saudis, they love to talk
 174 English. They love to do the business in English, especially when it comes to
 175 DEEMA enrolment. Before I used to now these days most of the people, they
 176 can speak, they can talk, they can write. Before, I used to meet people who can't
 177 talk, who can't write, and [?]

178 **Saudis?**

179 It doesn't have to be necessarily Saudis. Even from Egypt. I used to [?]. Those
180 days I was like okay, you know and I had some people here working with me but
181 he left my team. He had experience, more experience than I do in this, but when
182 there was an opportunity for a position, you know, we the department manager
183 sat with all of us. They chose me probably because he wasn't able to
184 communicate properly with the people.

185 **Really? So you think linguistic abilities can sometimes be equally**
186 **important to field knowledge or your domain knowledge? Could it be more**
187 **important sometimes? Could it be less important? In what positions or in**
188 **what jobs it is that languages or skills are more important than field**
189 **knowledge, and in what domains it's less?**

190 It depends. Some people, especially in our department, I don't know if I should
191 say this @@@

192 **You can talk about whatever you want. It's strictly confidential.**

193 Yes, but to answer to that question is in our field of work you maybe find people
194 who are really good at fixing computers. Technically they are very good but
195 maybe when it comes to writing skills, communication skills, they cannot
196 compete with the people in the field. I mean they end up doing the same work
197 their whole life.

198 **Because this is the only thing they can do.**

199 IT is not just about computers in this modern world.

200 **IT is not just about computers in this modern world, communication?**

201 Totally because you will find communication [?] IT is everywhere. You find IT
202 everywhere. At home you have computers. Everywhere you go, you take iPad
203 with you to communicate, everything, so I find it equally important.

204 **That's interesting, especially in IT. I would imagine someone to say why do**
205 **I need English in IT? I just work with my hands.**

206 No.

207 **Do you think that if this is the only thing they do they can stay in this job**
208 **forever because that's the only thing they can do?**

209 Of course because now, because I don't know if you have heard about new
210 process in the IT infrastructure called IDIL.

211 **No I don't know that.**

212 Even I'm trying to learn it It's very new in the market. It's called IDIL. It's not just
213 like if somebody calls you and says "I have a problem. Can you come and fix it

214 for me?" There should be a process. It's like any other department like finance,
215 purchase and all this stuff. IT is [?] you just get the problem and you fix it
216 straightaway, nothing else.

217 **What does IDIL stand for?**

218 Oooh I'm not sure @@@ I will find out for you.

219 **@@ Don't worry I can find out myself. I don't want to give you homework**
220 **(2)**

221 **Mmm How does Deema reward the fact you speak English? You told me**
222 **you were promoted.**

223 No not based on this alone. I mean yes speaking different languages open
224 doors of increased networking opportunities, and access to information (2)
225 and maybe accelerated promotion up your career ladder yes, but it is not all
226 that you know.

227 **Of course, you cannot just ignore all the experience you have.**

228 Not just based on that I speak English.

229 **You were assuming it could have contributed.**

230 Yes, it was one of the factors. It helped but you know

231 **Yeah yeah sure**

232 I do not try to show off but I am the best, well one of the best in the IT services
233 team and because I am outspoken and open and I am self-confident with
234 leading character. So I have a combination of factors.

235 **Yeah of course I can see that clearly. Hmmm do you find yourself**
236 **confident when you speak in English, as confident as when you speak**
237 **Malayalam?**

238 Sometimes not, to be honest.

239 **What are the things you find hardest to talk about in English? Do you find**
240 **talking about IT in English hard?**

241 No. IT is really okay. In fact it is the easiest.

242 **How about talking about other matters in English?**

243 When it comes to some kind of discussion, I mean debate, it can be hard.

244 **Debate?**

245 Yes. Could be politics really.

246 **Personal matters?**

247 No. Hmmm I rarely talk about this stuff in English.

248 **Is there a reason for that?**

249 No. Probably I never had to.

250 **How do you feel about having English as a corporate language you're**
 251 **working in Saudi Arabia having English as the language of DEEMA, how**
 252 **do you feel about that?**

253 Do you mean if I think it is important or necessary?

254 **I don't know, whatever you have in your mind**

255 Hmm I think it is good but not ABSOLUTELY necessary. I do not like this third
 256 language obstacle I mean I mean you have a language you have a language but
 257 we speak a third language. I mean personally I think usually as products and
 258 services need to be localized to suit particular local markets, companies need to
 259 to respond and adapt to the cultural requirements of their operations so I think
 260 insisting that English MUST be the medium of communication across the
 261 company is unnecessary and sometimes DISRESPECTful to the local culture like
 262 in here in Saudi Arabia. I think that's why in certain departments like call centre
 263 and PR they care about customer satisfaction so they hire Arabic speakers and
 264 train them to be good in responding in Arabic as they say.

265 **Interesting really and I do understand. How about you, do you think you**
 266 **would work in Saudi Arabia if the situation was different? I mean if Arabic**
 267 **was the official business language here?**

268 @@@@ This is tricky. I do not know actually. It is a facilitator indeed but ideal
 269 no (2) like in my case it kind of somehow deprived me from learning Arabic
 270 which will not be possible in this very westernized work environment.

271 **So you do think it is a facilitator? Is it hmm don't you appreciate the fact**
 272 **that you do not have to work in a place where Arabic is the official**
 273 **language and then people have to translate to you.**

274 I used to feel happy that I don't have to speak in Arabic. There are places I've
 275 read people say there's no way you have to learn Arabic if you want to work
 276 there.

277 **No way you learn Arabic.**

278 No. I mean some of my friends had this situation. They had to learn Arabic if
 279 they want to work, otherwise they're going to be in trouble.

280 **And that's not in DEEMA of course.**

281 Yes. I mean it's going to affect their performance. Not in DEEMA, outside. In
282 Saudi. I was thinking I'm very lucky because

283 **You don't have to.**

284 Yes. It's not that critical for me to learn Arabic. It's not that important for me. It's
285 not life threatening or a job threatening thing to learn Arabic. Yes, it's not really
286 bothering me that I don't know Arabic. I can still do my job. I am doing it in a
287 good way. I can perform well. There's no obstacle. But later, from a personal
288 point of view, I was thinking like there should be an option for me to learn Arabic.

289 **Why didn't you take advantage of staying here for eight years, just for my**
290 **personal curiosity?**

291 No, but, okay, before I became the team leader of the IT support team I used to
292 be the support officer. So for your information I joined this company when the
293 head count was just 100. I mean the number of employees were below 100. In
294 IT we were only three people and then me. I used to be the IT guy for all
295 employees in DEEMA at that time, so when they have problem they just call. I
296 go to them and fix the problems. Then we had this telesales department. I don't
297 know if you've been to that floor. It's telesales, call centre. It's all ladies, it was,
298 so they just that was in 2006, probably 2006 or 2007. That time they came up
299 with that they said we need to have this department. The business is growing, so
300 they brought many employees, females.

301 **Yes, there was a certain time when everybody started working for DEEMA.**
302 **I meet someone and she says "I work for DEEMA," then I met someone**
303 **else and and it's Deema again. It's like the name of DEEMA in the female**
304 **employment environment just came out of the blue. There was a boom.**

305 Yes, so in that time those employees, most of them, I would say 90 out of 100,
306 they won't speak English and they only have me to help them with their IT
307 issues. So they call me, they try to explain in their own way, so I tried to pick up=

308 **=What they try to say.**

309 Yes. So honestly that was a very good learning experience for me and that's
310 how I learn. I don't say I mean a good thing is I can understand. When people
311 talk in Arabic I can listen to them. When they talk, I can understand what their
312 problem is, what they are trying to say, what they're trying to convey, so it was a
313 learning time for me. But I could not build on that because I had to change my
314 job.

315 **Of course, but you didn't consider taking Arabic lessons, like a language**
316 **course.**

317 I did, but my circumstances did not let me go for it.

318 **You're busy. I can understand that.**

319 I prefer because not at the work, outside, I'm having trouble communicating.

320 **Really? I find English everywhere in Saudi Arabia, but how can I tell? I**
 321 **probably do not notice things because I can speak Arabic.**

322 Yeah. We usually have this problem when we want to get [?] and other other I
 323 mean the government offices.

324 **But you don't go to government offices, do you?**

325 We do sometimes, not for everything. Jawazat for example, recently I had an
 326 issue. I had to [?] for the jawaz of my wife, so I had to go there. Only I could do
 327 that. They need me to be there. They need me to be present there. So they
 328 asked me several questions and I couldn't understand. They called someone to
 329 translate after a LONG wait.

330 **I think this is stupid. We find English everywhere, except in a place where**
 331 **you have to meet people who do not speak Arabic. There should be**
 332 **someone in the foreign ministry or Jawazat there should be someone in**
 333 **this department who speaks English. You find English in a mosque but**
 334 **can't find it in a place where all the non-Arabic speakers go to. That's**
 335 **Saudi.**

336 To be honest, that has changed a lot. They get better you know, like other
 337 countries, UAE and all Saudis. I mean of course before, I remember before eight
 338 years I didn't see any ladies working in any companies.

339 **It's changing.**

340 Very seldom where I've been. I've been to a couple of companies that are big
 341 companies. I don't see any ladies working.

342 **Do you have a problem communicating with Saudi ladies?**

343 No. Not at all. I find it easy, accessible. Some people do have certain worries
 344 with communicating with Saudi ladies in the business environment, but I don't
 345 face such problems. It's okay.

346 **As though you're dealing with a man.**

347 I find it much easier to be honest.

348 **I'm surprised because some of your colleagues told me they find it hard to**
 349 **deal with women because they don't know what they consider acceptable.**

350 The issue is because of the pre-concept that he has in his mind. I was thinking
 351 about it. I told you when I was going to the telesales department in those days,

352 okay, all of a sudden they started with 25 people, then in a few months' time
353 they got 150, so since then they were just growing in numbers.

354 **Overwhelming.**

355 Yes, still we didn't have people. I was the only one going there all the time. So
356 for this 150 people there was one man managing all of them.

357 **That's a lot of women @@@**

358 @@ yeah I used to get warning from my Saudi friends in other departments
359 saying to be careful

360 **Yeah**

361 Yes. Sometimes it can be problematic. They might misunderstand you, so when
362 you talk or when you deal with them you have to be very careful. But never, ever
363 I'm telling you the truth whenever I talk to them, whenever they talk to me also I
364 find it very much easier than I talk to gents.

365 **Tell me why. What particularly is challenging about talking to Saudi men,**
366 **to some of them?**

367 Sometimes I don't want to change my personality. I try to be very frank with
368 them. I talk to them very freely, with open mind. These people, I mean initially I
369 had this thinking maybe they won't understand me, they will find it weird or
370 strange, but they give the right response. They say "oh really, okay. We do this
371 with our friends." So I find it like okay, what's the difference? It's human beings.
372 Everyone has feelings and everything. It's [?] so I was just like people just
373 talking rubbish because they also [?] in some cases, because of the culture
374 tradition

375 **Give me examples if you can recall an example of culture playing a role in**
376 **miscommunication or communication.**

377 You see, like here, girls, they must wear scarf, but in other places you don't find
378 people wearing this even if they are Muslim. They will just put a scarf like this.

379 **Loosely.**

380 Yes. So when we talk about family, I showed them before, when my sister got
381 married I showed them the picture.

382 **They were surprised.**

383 Yes, they were just like oh, come on.

384 **You're showing your sister's photos to everyone.**

385 Not in that sense, but I showed this to the ladies. They were just like oh. Our
 386 culture and their culture are different, getting married and all this stuff. The same
 387 thing, when I shared it with my male colleagues they were like you people just
 388 don't cover your feelings and [?]. Then they explained to me about this and rules
 389 of marriage. They said they know only guys don't supposed to attend, no one
 390 else. You cannot take a [?] with him and all this. It's totally different.

391 **I absolutely understand. If you have another sister getting married soon, I**
 392 **guess you won't be sharing pictures with Saudi men again @@@**

393 I absolutely will never do that again.

394 **This is really interesting, but unfortunately, we'll have to go back to the**
 395 **language topic again.**

396 Of course.

397 **Hmmm have you ever found yourself in a situation where you hesitated to**
 398 **participate in something? In a meeting, for example, you didn't participate**
 399 **because of language skills, any language. Was it ever an impediment or a**
 400 **hindrance to you participating? I mean you described communicating in a**
 401 **third language as obstacle**

402 Yes. Sometimes at the beginning of my career here in SA, but it was temporary,
 403 a matter of time. But I had no time to waste in being shy. I had to help and
 404 participate and contribute because we were only three.

405 **Do you remember a certain incident where language was a problem to you?**

406 Hmm. Let me think

407 **Take all the time you want**

408 No I can't think of an example. I don't remember.

409 **It is fine.**

410 But it did happen over some time. But things are changing now here: society,
 411 media, education everything.

412 **Now, if you had the chance to speak to someone who teaches English and**
 413 **business English to Saudis, what would you say to them? What would you**
 414 **want Saudis to learn?**

415 No. Saudis are good. I have good respect for them comparing to other people. I
 416 stress on this, Saudis compared to other people in the region are very good and
 417 polite too. Maybe they have problem communicating using the language. I've
 418 high respect for some of this because I've been dealing with because usually I
 419 deal with hundreds of people on a daily basis over the phone and email, so

420 since I started I know because that's why I clearly mentioned the other people in
421 the region.

422 **What do you think about other groups then?**

423 I don't know if I'm right saying that somebody is less polite or somebody is least
424 polite. The thing is that you find this everywhere. Saudis are also very
425 accountable.

426 **Always?**

427 Of course, not always but in general. But aaah they have a major problem.
428 Sometimes they can be less transparent less direct indirect if I can say that.

429 **Can you explain more?**

430 I don't know anyway it depends on, for example, if I talk to somebody at
431 management level or higher level they try to do their best to keep their words
432 and be transparent. Again, it depends on not only with Saudis, with other people.
433 It depends. Low grade, people working on low grade, how do you say I mean
434 they're also equally good but they cannot maybe keep their words. Do you
435 understand what I'm saying?

436 **Yes I do. Thanks.**

437 **Now, could you please tell me if you have to deal often with the top**
438 **management and with the board?**

439 Yes. All the time.

440 **Does the atmosphere or the dynamics of the communication change with**
441 **them? I mean is it different from the way you communicate with your**
442 **colleagues at the same level?**

443 Hmm yes of course it is different. But not only because of the language. So
444 many things play roles.

445 **Of course.**

446 Although it is on that level you have to deal with the native.

447 **Interesting. So how do you find dealing with them? Speaking to them? I**
448 **mean compared to the non native speakers of English?**

449 Yes, the [?] is different, how they pronounce their words and dialogues. It's
450 totally different.

451 **It's entirely different, but easier or harder?**

452 I can understand. I'm able to pick both, so I don't know how I can answer this.

453 **You don't have to answer if you feel that you didn't notice they are harder.**

454 They can be harder sometimes, but they notice when you don't understand so
455 they understand.

456 **So what do they do then?**

457 I don't know. They speak slower some of them and maybe use not very
458 complicated words.

459 **Can you tell me more?**

460 Hmmm I do not know what you want me to say @@

461 **Like about your experience of dealing with English native speakers?**

462 Hmm no actually I can't think of anything.

463 **Ok, moving to another topic now. Do you have friends from Deema?**

464 I have many friends many many friends everywhere in Deema, but if you are
465 asking about best friends, I only have one here. Nazim from claims, do you know
466 him?

467 **Yeah, I met him once.**

468 Yeah he is also from Kerala, my area.

469 **So he speaks Malayalam too?**

470 Yes of course. Wesam introduced me to him he did the matchmaking @@@
471 we're always together.

472 **Yeah I noticed that you always have your lunch breaks together. Do you**
473 **think this is the reason why you are close friends, I mean that you both**
474 **speak the same language?**

475 I don't know. Maybe. When Wesam told me that he met an Indian from Kerala
476 and he asked him where he works and I went to his desk and we became
477 friends immediately (2) I agree language plays roles but also because we are
478 from Kerala we are all similar almost similar so it is easier to befriend someone
479 similar to you, right?

480 **But it is something I noticed here. Not only you and Nazim, but everyone**
481 **seems to have friends from the same or maybe similar backgrounds.**

482 Yes, same countries and same states @@@ like me and Nazim. They help
483 each other. They talk to each other. They meet their family, talk to each other, so
484 they try to make this group, this circle.

485 **You didn't find yourself in a group like this, in a circle like this. You didn't**
 486 **put yourself in a circle like this. I mean with people other than Nazim.**

487 Yes, I find myself closer to other Indians, and then Bengalis and Pakistanis. So
 488 yeah I can see a pattern @@@@ You make me notice things I never think of I
 489 should thank you.

490 **I am glad you think so @@@**

491 **Aaah do you think religion (you being a Muslim) do you think it's part of**
 492 **what facilitated you living and communicating with Saudis or living in**
 493 **Saudi Arabia? Let's say you were a Hindu. Do you think living in Saudi**
 494 **Arabia would be as easy as it is for you as a Muslim, or is it ...**

495 Yes. It should be the same.

496 **Do you think Islam is a privilege for people ... for someone who's coming**
 497 **from outside.**

498 Privilege, those who take it personally because they have chance to pride in
 499 religion, but not me no.

500 **But you go to pray, for example, when you go upstairs to pray, don't you**
 501 **find that you're part of a larger group that other people who are not**
 502 **Muslims are not part of?**

503 It gives you kind of a membership to a larger group as you say and I enjoy it.
 504 Yes, of course you feel good in that situation, but I don't think it gives you any
 505 special privilege.

506 **That's good to know. Now again back to the language topic, what do you**
 507 **think the language number one is here in DEEMA Arabia?**

508 English 100% English.

509 **Do you think it has any official status here in BA?**

510 I don't understand your question

511 **I mean is it the OFFICIAL language here in Deema Arabia according to a**
 512 **written policy for example?**

513 Yes yes, I think it is. Of course it is or else we will be speaking and writing in
 514 Arabic.

515 **You don't feel frustrated because Arabic is the native language of the**
 516 **majority of the staff.**

517 No. It's one of the things you face when working in a foreign country. But people
 518 coming from Asian countries like us, Indian and Filipinos, I mean they don't find
 519 it very difficult to work.

520 **Did you ever borrow or learn new words from your Urdu speaking**
 521 **colleagues, Hindi speaking colleagues, or Filipino?**

522 @@@ Yes, we do that.

523 **Give me an example. Did you pick anything from other languages?**

524 Sam is team manager and there's one guy also working with me, Filipino, Eric.
 525 His name is Eric.

526 **Did you pick up anything from their language?**

527 Yes, little things. Yeah

528 **Tell me.**

529 Like [?] I know they call it [?].

530 **Which means?**

531 Friends. They're all friends. Also, [?].

532 **Which means?**

533 Also friends, like your colleagues. [?].

534 **What about Urdu? Hindi, you already have Hindi background, but did you**
 535 **pick up anything from your Urdu friends?**

536 Yes, Urdu, to be honest, when I first arrived here I don't know how to speak
 537 Urdu. I can understand because by watching all the Bollywood movies I
 538 understand a little. Then when I started mingling with these people I could start
 539 to speak as well, so I still watch Bollywood movies, so what happens is I speak
 540 to people in real life and I watch Bollywood movies, so my language gets
 541 improved. That's how I learn. I'm most of the time talking to them in Urdu, which
 542 is not my language.

543 **Wow I'm impressed. So if you were having conversation with someone in**
 544 **one of your mother tongues and someone doesn't speak this language, do**
 545 **you switch to English if a Filipino comes to a place where you are**
 546 **speaking with one of the Hindi**

547 Yes, I do that.

548 **Automatically, even if it's irrelevant to this person?**

549 No, not all the time, to be honest. Not all the time we do that because usually
550 you get the comment from the third person saying that come on, what you're
551 saying, talk in English.

552 **Aha**

553 I speak five languages and I love to speak to people in their language. I do
554 not like the obstacle of a third language which is English in most cases so
555 depending on whom I am talking with, I try to talk in their language in order to
556 be closer to the other, I prefer to choose the language of the person in front
557 of me, that is if I know this language adequately @@@

558 **Really nice of you (.) hmm when you speak to someone who's less able to**
559 **speak English, someone who's less proficient at English, do you modify**
560 **your English? Do you make it easier, like you said when you talk to these**
561 **ladies who don't speak English?**

562 I've tried. I believe it's a mistake.

563 **Why? You're modifying your English.**

564 I'm not a native speaker of English. If I try to::

565 **You're just trying to adjust it to other people.**

566 No. I see it in a different way because if you do that, first of all, you're not
567 improving your English and you're not teaching anything to that person.

568 **But in business do you need=**

569 =Business-wise is something else. On business level, person to person,
570 because I feel like on several occasions I've noticed that they want to learn but
571 they don't have any option. I try to help. I've had situations like people come to
572 me and ask to write an email for them or request for them, and they call [?] I've
573 got this word in Arabic, can you translate? How can I say it in English? Can you
574 help me? You know, going through all that. For me, as you said, when I speak to
575 somebody who's not really good in English, so I used to help them. Not maybe
576 telling them I'm going to help you like that, but literally I help them. I try to make
577 them understand. Probably I slow down so they will understand.

578 **Do you use different synonyms?**

579 I do that, yes.

580 **Different words for the same thing.**

581 Easier words I use but I don't change the [?] I mean you can't just play with the
582 grammar. You cannot just play with the accent. I mean in spoken English you
583 don't care about grammar. I know that.

584 **Oh it's been more than an hour now. I know you're meeting Thamer now.**

585 Yeah he's probably waiting now.

586 **One last question or maybe a favour, do you know anybody who has**
587 **anything to do with language you think is going to be a good candidate for**
588 **my interview?**

589 I think you might have already got a few people.

590 **I'm just saying if someone else you think you heard somebody talking**
591 **about language and you think this person is interesting for me.**

592 Maybe hmm

593 **There's Mustafa. He told me he's going to get back to me. Thank you very**
594 **much for this. It was a very interesting conversation.**

595 **(61:12)**